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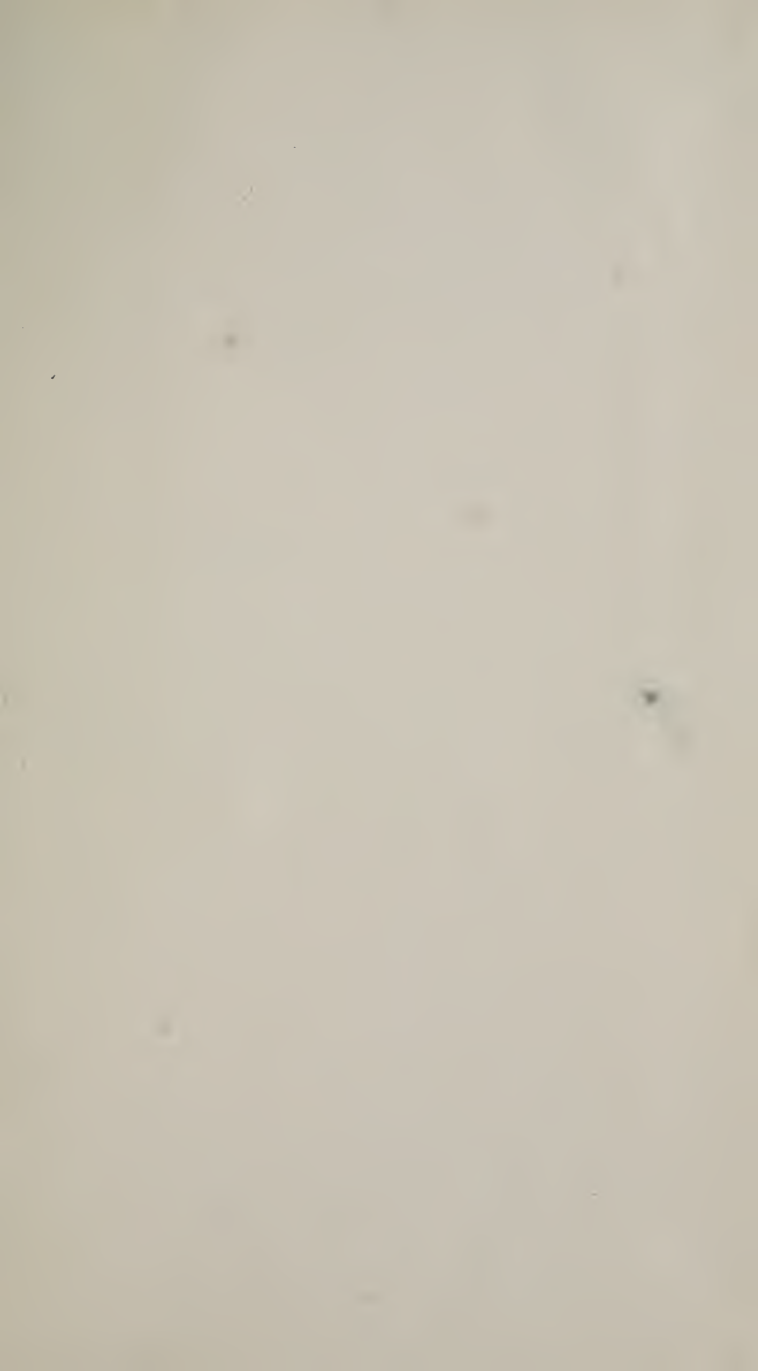
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PUCK.

VOL. III.

PUCK:

His Vicissitudes, Adventures, Observations, Conclusions,
Friendships, and Philosophies,

RELATED BY HIMSELF,

AND EDITED BY

OUIDA,

AUTHOR OF 'STRATHMORE,' 'IDALIA,' 'TRICOTRIN,'
'UNDER TWO FLAGS,' &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON:

CHAPMAN AND HALL, 193, PICCADILLY.

1870.

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‘ Je vous ai dit ce que j’ai vu. Si vous ne l’aimez pas, ne dites pas du mal de moi. Blâmez, plutôt, votre monde dans lequel j’ai trouvé ces balourdises, ces friponneries, cette beauté qui escroque, ces femmes qui dévorent, cette passion qui ne cherche que du butin, ces amours qui ne cherchent que de l’argent.’

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P U C K.

CHAPTER I.

‘CLÉOPÂTRE.’

‘**I**T is as you said,’ I lamented to Russ.
‘Of course,’ he made answer, ‘Where two people love it is always the deep heart that breaks itself for the shallow one. Oh—I do not say his is shallow really, but it is for this passion. Do you not know that a man’s passions are just like the channels of water-courses; some seasons they are narrow as runlets, others they are as broad as rivers; sometimes a child can straddle athwart them, and plumb them with his little forefinger, and at others a man shall not cross them with safety to his own life. It just depends on how the storm has come down.’

Which was no doubt true ; and the storm-drum never yet has beaten that has warned men of a fatal passion.

So the spring time came, and went, sadly at the Silver Stag ; though there was no lack of guests and of passers-by all through that lovely cowslip time. There were always artists, of some standing or another, staying there, from the gray-headed masters to the laughter-loving students, and one and all these talked of Carlos Merle.

By Madelon's desire no one knew aught of the relationship between them, and so they spoke of him fully and frankly as of a familiar mutual theme of interest. It was only when they touched, as she thought, too closely on the personal matters of his life that she would check their converse ; as though, in the pure undivided loyalty of her soul, she feared to seem to do him the dishonour to glean by hearsay what he withheld from confidence. But old Manon Bris, less scrupulous and more inquisitive, asked all she could of his life in the city from the men who came beneath her roof, and caught many glimpses in it of extravagance, and heedlessness, and pleasure, that wore the look of evil to her sturdy peasant's mind.

‘Carlos lives as a prince in Paris,’ she muttered to her daughter.

‘Oh no, mère,’ Madelon answered her in deprecation. ‘He lives as every artist that is at all known must do. Do not believe that boy Looloo’s chatter; he is a little scaramouche, who thinks it a feast to get a full meal of roast chestnuts, his people have always been so poor, and he is such a child; he can be no judge of how a man should live.’

‘Carlos was as poor two months ago!’

‘Not quite, mère; and beside, if he were, he has earned a large wage, and a just, since then; he may surely have some pleasure from the price of his own labours.’

‘He will never marry you, Madelon,’ muttered the old woman, in discontent and doubt.

‘He would marry me now, mère, if I would have it so,’ Madelon answered her gently.

And this was true, for every time that Carlos came back thither he renewed with almost feverish entreaty his offers of an immediate union. But perhaps Madelon detected the accent of honour only, and not of passion in his words; or perhaps she felt, that he sought to bind his will by law, because he felt it unstable in inclination; at any rate she an-

swered to him always, 'Not yet.'

It was not from any fear for herself I am sure. Madelon was not the kind of woman that fears; I think it was rather that she feared for him, and that she desired to leave this beautiful future, which was now unclosing to him, altogether free and entirely without claim or lien on it.

'Servitude is well for women,' she would say to him; 'they are hardly happy free; but with men it is otherwise:—liberty is the very marrow of their bones.'

And she would not wed with him earlier than that late autumn time which her mother had originally fixed. Yet though she was so resolute, her cheeks grew thinner, and her eyes larger and brighter every day; and I think that, if she had once heard the pleading of actual love quiver in his voice, she would have put her hand in his and never have withdrawn it till the priest's benediction had made it his own.

Maybe those women are happiest who easily deceive themselves. Madelon was not of them. The essential truthfulness in her made her, no doubt, specially keen to feel any grain of truth that was lacking in others. 'He does not really

love me,’ she had told herself the very night on which she first heard of his love ; and the lowliness of her self-esteem made it appear to her impossible that he ever should do so.

The full deep spring came ; the great plumes of the lilacs nodding everywhere, and the grasses all yellow with cowslip bells. The days began to grow long, and be sultry at noon. The mavises and linnets sang all the light hours through, scarce still even at the noontide. But over the place a certain sadness fell—in the deserted painting-room the shadows lay unbroken by any passing foot ; to the well in the orchard Madelon went alone ; nor ever now would she wait to bind a coil of ivy round the handle of the pail, or gather the big white marguerites that grew there, to make of their petals a sundial for love. In the few times that brought thither a laughing group of students and of girls, she served them silently with wine and milk, honey and meat, coffee and cake, and then withdrew herself, so far as might be possible, from out the hearing of the mirthful cadences of laughter ; and in the evenings, when the day was done and the little latch lay quiet in the gate, she would take her work and sit beside the open lattice, looking ever and again at the calm

gray sky beyond, as in the picture he had drawn.

But the look that was in her eyes no longer seemed the same. The hush of maidenhood was gone, the rapture of marriage and maternity had not come ; there was only the vague, passionate, dumb anguish of the womanhood, which, in the same hour that it learns passion, learns likewise abandonment.

Now, amongst those youths who came and went in the golden April days, amongst the lilacs of the Silver Stag, young painters of careless tongue and mirthful mischief, there were many who spoke of the doings of Carlos in Paris, and tangled many names with his, as young men will. But chiefly they quoted one, a name of melody and meaning,—Cléopâtre.

Madelon grew paler whenever the name was mentioned ; but she never asked whom it might mean. Perhaps she knew.

‘You are painting the portrait of Cléopâtre?’ she said straightly to him when he next came. He started and looked at her.

‘Who told you so?’—it was the first thing that he had not of his own accord related to her.

‘The students say so,’ she answered. ‘Is it true?’

‘Yes ; it is true, for that matter.’

Her voice sank very low.

‘She is a bad woman, Carlos?’

‘A vile woman—’

‘Why have you aught to do with her, then?’

‘To do!—she is a perfectly beautiful woman; she sought a portrait of me. She is an empress in her way. Was it worth while to refuse?’

He spoke hurriedly, bending to and fro a bough of blossoming lilac.

‘I thought you would never paint portraits?’—

‘No, nor do I,—but this woman is like no one else. She is a woman that comes once in five centuries!’

‘She is so beautiful?—I understand.’

‘No, you cannot understand,’ he muttered. ‘Madelon, Madelon, I swear to you that I never hated the Faustine of my fancy more than I hate this hell-born Cléopâtre!’

She looked at him earnestly; and a shudder ran through her.

‘You defied Faustine!’ she murmured with a shiver. ‘Oh, my love, my love, my love,—beware!’

It was one of the few moments in which the great affection in her broke up into yearning and passionate speech.

Carlos stooped and kissed her ; but his face was flushed, and his caressing answer was incoherent in its breathless and vague promise.

And with the dawn of the morning he went back to Paris.

During the week, which was now May, there came many parties of students to the gardens of the Silver Stag ; and they often spoke this one name—Cléopâtre. So they had christened a strange woman, come two summer seasons earlier to Paris. They spoke of her great torch-light fête, of her carriage with silver wheels, of her great sapphire hollowed for a sweetmeat box, of her domino powdered with fire-flies in gold, of her enormous stakes won at games of dice, of her tiny house, that though so small was as perfect as a palace, and filled with all fabulous worth. And they said, also, with gay laughter, that her last caprice was Carlos Merle.

‘Your old friend will fare ill, Madelon,’ they laughed to her, not meaning cruelly, because they knew not where they wounded. ‘He goes every day to paint the portrait of Cléopâtre—oh-hè !—and no man can look long upon her and live ! They say that seeing how he had painted the Faustine,

she was minded to have her vengeance.’

Madelon never made answer ; except once, when she said, gravely, that to speak at all of such as Cléopâtre to honest women was not well. Which silenced the reckless youths ; and made them mute on the subject, for they held her in reverence and love.

As for me, where he left me in the quiet country place, I wondered ceaselessly what she could be, this strange and marvellous creature, whom they had christened thus ; they had depicted her in their words till I seemed to behold her, with her full-lidded lustrous eyes, that had such magnetism in them ; with her curling lips, that so seldom spoke, yet breathed a sorcery over men ; and with her chain of tawny topaz, that seemed like a yellow snake about her throat.

Any way,—I felt that she was evil.

As the season grew, and the summer came, the men who spent their leisure at the Auberge ceased to speak of Carlos Merle when Madelon or her mother were by. When they were alone, I heard them talk of him, of how his head was turned by the delirium of success, of how he was like one drunk with his triumphs ; of how he flung

his gold broadcast, so that he must soon be more utterly than ever a beggar ; of how he was devoured body and soul by one passion, and of how his genius was consuming as a reed in a flame.

‘It is Cléopâtre,’ they said. ‘She kills them all so. You remember the Prince de Ferras?—ruined in one winter, and run through the heart for her by a Russian, when she had pillaged him to her will. Recall too how it was with Bernaldés, when he had wakened up all Europe with that Venus of his?—how she set herself to steal the nerve from his arm, and the cunning from his hand, and the fire from his brain, till he never rounded a line of marble more, but died raving mad in Bicêtre? It will be the same here.’

‘It is Cléopâtre,’ another echoed one day ; an old wise man, grown gray in the service of Art. ‘There are women who abhor genius ; women to whom it is horrible that a man should live who can be sufficient for himself ; women who set themselves to tempt, and corrupt, and destroy it, as the devils of the legends set themselves to kill innocence. It offends them, insults them, escapes them, outrages them, because it defies them :—and they set themselves to have their vengeance on it,

and to drag it down into the dust, where they can spit on it. There are women whose whole life is a war against all that lifts men out of hell; they are scorpions who spit death upon every holy thing.’

Did Madelon hear as well as I heard ?

Sometimes I feared that she did, for her face grew utterly weary, and she never once now lilted a song as she worked. What could she do ?

Ah nothing !—only wait, and wait, and wait with that sublime patience which is the heroism of such women.

The throbbing summer came ; all heat, and colour, and storm, and wondrous light. There seemed fire in all the scarlet roses and all the electric skies, and all the hot hard days, in which the very bees seemed drunk, and the very cattle drugged. Everything was silent, and gasping, and white with furnace heat, all things languished, stupefied yet burning, as a man may lie in the height of a mortal fever.

In the sultry height of the summer the visits of Carlos altogether ceased.

There came no word of explanation from him, there was only silence.

The long evening stole away on every Saturday, and sank down into night, and the little click of the latch sounded no more through the stillness. The Sunday noons brought with them the gay glad parties of youths and maidens who romped together through the tall seeding grasses and the yellowing corn, who loaded themselves with fruits and garlands of green leaves, who danced in the dewy starlight, and sang, and shouted, and chased each other through the shady espaliers and the blossoming lime-tree walks. But he came no more with either noon or night ; we heard no more the gladsome challenge of his voice, we saw no more the proud, bright, golden head like the head of a young god.

To the incessant questions of old Manon Bris, the painters who strayed thither only muttered now in answer that he was well, that he was much sought in the world, that he was busied incessantly upon the portrait of Cléopâtre ; and they would add no more, or had no more to add.

‘ You are sure it is well with him ? ’ Madelon once asked of a white-headed artist, laying her hands upon his arm, with a look from which his eyes turned away.

‘ It is well with his body, with his fame, with his

riches,’ the old man muttered. ‘Not well with his soul.’

On the morrow Madelon told her mother that she was about to go to Paris. The old woman did not seek to oppose her, and she was merciful enough to ask nothing of her errand.

Once she grumbled that, in her own youth, she would have thought it shame to go seek one who neglected her for a wanton; in her own girlhood women had deemed that a lover who was not kept by his fancy was ill kept by his troth-ring. But her daughter only smiled as she heard—the faint fleeting smile of one whose thoughts lie too deep for tears, and whose love lies too high to be gauged by mortal eyes; of one who is indifferent to appearance or to misconstruction. And at noon she went, wrapping about her a large dark cloak, and letting the fierce sun beat upon her unshaded head.

To Russ she signed to stay and guard the house; for me she stooped, as though seeming to pity my wistful look of unspoken petition, and bore me with her beneath her arm.

I believe that in a manner the presence near her of a little living thing which he had cherished had its consolation, and that I brought her sympathy because I loved him.

It was a very burning after-day as we entered the city. The dust was thick and gray upon the streets, and the glare was great from the whiteness of the houses; there was not a breath of wind stirring, and the air smelt hot and sickly, and as though it were loaded with wine fumes, and the reek of opium smoke.

Here and there a mosquito hooted, and a hornet buzzed, above the thronging crowds.

Here and there the scarlet glitter of a troop of soldiers flashed through the shadowless sunlight, like a blood-red shape of death.

She walked on long, not seeming to heed the oppression of the weather, or the scorching of the stones. She was not very certain of her way, and mistook it, and traced her steps only again to retrace them very often. Presently we came to a place that was thickly thronged; and the people were coming in and out of a house, and talking very eagerly amongst themselves, and she could hear the word that constantly recurred, — ‘*Cléopâtre, Cléopâtre.*’

‘Is it there?’ Madelon asked, and I saw her lips were dry and white as she did so. They told her that it was. She felt for a small coin, and paid it

in, where she saw others paying theirs, at a hole in a wall, where a money-taker sat; then she passed through with the rest into a chamber hung with crimson cloth, into which the people were pressing eagerly. I was hidden beneath her cloak, and passed in with her.

The room was lighted by a flood of light pouring downward from the top, and this light was so managed that it fell wholly on a solitary picture at the further end, set in a carved frame of ebony.

It was not a large picture; but the multitude were breathless before it, as they had stood before Faustine.

‘It is her living self!’ they murmured.

They meant the Cléopâtre.

She lay on a couch of purples and of lion skins, with her head leaning back on her arm, and her limbs lightly crossed on each other; she was unclothed save where some heavy folds of a Tyrian robe were flung across her; and save for heavy rings of massive gold that clasped her ankles and her wrists; she seemed just waking from slumber, and her eyes looked out from under their languid lids with a peculiar glittering, furtive, voluptuous, merciless regard, whilst with one hand she drew

against her scarlet lips one gorgeous blossom of the pomegranate.

In the distance, beyond a marble archway, were the reeds reddening in the after-glow, the ruby skies of sunset, and one slender palm shaft cutting sharp against the gold of an Egyptian night.

It was a wondrous picture: marvellous, because in its revival of the dead beauty of old Nile it also gave the living presentment of that beauty which Paris saw amidst it every day.

It was Cléopâtre—but Cléopâtre living, no less than Cléopâtre dead.

‘It is she!’ they murmured in ecstasy; for Cléopâtre was in a measure dear to them, by reason of that supremacy in infamy, that mercilessness in destruction, which made her heroic and deified in their sight. And it was she indeed they said, as they stood about the picture: all the dreamy sensualism, all the dormant power, all the oriental languor, all the leonine force that were in the living woman were in the portrait also.

‘Before he could have painted *that*,’ muttered an aged artist as he gazed, ‘he must have sold his soul to her.’

Madelon gazed on it as on some dread thing

that compelled her regard, even whilst it blinded her, as the lightning fascinates, yet withers up the eyesight. I felt her tremble as she looked; and she seized for support the brass rod that ran before the painting, severing the niche where it hung from the crowd of the sight-seers.

The cruelty and the splendour of this beauty seemed to fascinate, and to paralyze her, almost, as they did all men that gazed on them. She gazed, and gazed, and gazed, until every drop of blood faded from her lips and cheeks; as though it were drawn out and absorbed by that imperial, scornful, deep-hued face, that made her own pale as a corpse, and poor as a faded violet.

‘How shall you be remembered one hour beside such as I?’ the mocking, changeless, lustrous eyes seemed to demand of her in their scorn; and Madelon seemed to shiver, and droop, and die out as it were, beneath that gaze.

Those smooth, opal-hued, glistening limbs; that soft velvet skin, with the golden bloom of a fresh peach upon it; that dreaming repose of a half-banished sleep; that curling mouth that half caressed the flower; that deep full bosom that heaved above its ceinture of dead gold: how could the man who

studied these, from their warm life abandoned to his sight and touch, have had a thought, or wish, or memory left for any other thing ?

She blamed him no more ; she marvelled no more ; but her head dropped like one who has been stricken a physical blow, and she turned, and went feebly out of the little crimson chamber, with the unsteady flickering step of bodily sickness.

To resist, to hope, to believe in herself were no more possible to her : with her own eyes she had beheld this power against which she long in blindness had contended ; with her own eyes she had seen what manner of thing it was, this sorcery of the senses, this lust of the flesh, this temptation by the breath of a woman, wherein the strength of her enemy lay ; and she contended no more, she no more resisted, but went feebly out into the sunshine, knowing that never again could she have either place or memory within his life.

Ah ! I have seen the same warfare many times ; the same contest betwixt the soul and the senses, betwixt the love that is sanctity and the love that is devilry, betwixt the woman who seeks a man for the god-head there is in him, and the woman who

seeks a man for the bestiality there is in him ; and I have never seen it end in any other fashion than this ; never seen it come to any other close, than for the lily to die away, crushed beneath his foot ; and for the passion-flower to grow high, and wild, and free in triumph, above the ruin of his house.

Madelon was a woman pure of soul, high of thought, loving nobly and with innocence, desiring the greatness of that which she loved, and seeking its honour before her own joy ; Cléopâtre bared her limbs to the painter’s gaze, and looked into his with her burning cold eyes ; and gliding forth from her bath to her mirror, with the water glistening on her polished skin, said in her soul that he should love her in such wise, that this love should kill all manhood, all conscience, all godliness, all genius within him, and deliver him over to her prostrate, worthless, a mockery of men.

Yet it was Cléopâtre, and not Madelon, that he loved.

Wherefore ? Well, not because he was base : because there is a marvellous sorcery in the mere bodily beauty of women ; and because there is a madness and a drunkenness in love, that go

best, as it seems, with the liberty and fever of vice.

And this is why in love there is so much of woe, and so little of contentment; because pure women are too cold, and passionate women are too vile; and when men stoop for kisses, their lips are either chilled to ice, or scorched with flame. Then, being content with neither, they break the bonds of love, and are pointed at as faithless,—not with much justice in the charge.

Madelon went out into the street with the same feeble wandering gait; and her face had a wan, scared, paralyzed look upon it, as though she had seen some sight that had frozen her blood and stopped the pulses of her heart.

She moved mechanically out of the throngs, and into some cool quiet gardens of the public, whose trees threw their shadows opposite the house where the portrait of Cléopâtre was hung for exhibition. The gardens were almost deserted, and she sank down into a wooden chair under the shelter of a great sweet-chestnut. One of the guardians of the place approached her, and brought her a drink of water, thinking she was faint. She put it aside gently, and asked him only to leave her in peace. She sat there quite motionless, it must have been

nigh an hour; and the gray, rigid, startled look upon her face never faded away.

On the clear air the voices of the crowds, from the other side of the rails, came plainly to where we sat. They kept going in and out of the picture-chamber by hundreds all the afternoon long. Cléopâtre was known to all Paris, and this painting of her had a fascination as wide as the city.

Ever and anon there floated on the wind little fragments of their talk; words of wonder, praise, and homage: the artist of Faustine had been great, but the artist of Cléopâtre was greater. It was well with his genius as yet.

Madelon writhed as she heard.

The desire of her prayers had been given to her, he had fame, and the world gave him honour;—and she sat alone here, forgotten by him as the picture of the woman at the lattice was forgotten by Paris before the portrait of a courtesan! She had voluntarily delivered him up to his art, she had willingly surrendered him to the claims of ambition:—and all that art and ambition had done had been to bring him to the murderous embraces, and reward him with the poisonous kisses, of the deadliest temptress of Paris.

‘ Oh, could he but have been content without fame,’ she cried ; but she knew that he never could have been this, and that, if in selfishness she had striven to bind him down to the obscurity of her own humble and innocent life of labour, the stifled desires and the feverish unrest within him would have killed his peace in a slow torture as surely as hers was now slain at one deathblow.

She had done that which was right, though the issue thereof was evil.

After awhile she rose and left the gardens, and asked her way to the place where his painting-rooms were. I do not think she knew clearly what she meant to do. I believe she only felt some vague impulse, such as a woman, whose great love yet made her humble, might well feel to look once more—and for the last time—upon his face, and leave him for ever to the infamy of the temptress who had robbed him of her.

People guided her willingly towards the artists’ quarter. She knew little of the city, and in her misery seemed to have forgotten all she did know. It was now quite late in the day, though the sun had not set ; it was still intensely hot, and the crowds were growing larger, as all those whose work was

done came out to seek a breath of air under the sultry yellow skies.

She made her way with some difficulty to the street where his atelier was: there was no one in the building except an old negress who had the charge of it, and who did such little house-work as the four or five painters living on its several floors required. This negress knew me again, and roughly bade Madelon enter her little porter's lodge, and rest. But Madelon scarcely heard, she only asked if Carlos Merle were now within the house.

The old black woman looked at her curiously, standing in her grimy den, a little old uncouth figure, black as soot, with all rude vivid colours in her ragged dress.

‘Carlos Merle!’ she echoed. ‘No, Carlos Merle rarely comes here now.’

‘He lives elsewhere?’

‘Elsewhere!’ the negress laughed grimly, ‘elsewhere! Who are you that do not know of the caprice of Cléopâtre?’

A shudder passed over Madelon's form, but she was a resolute woman, and brave, and she asked still:

‘What caprice is it that you mean?’

‘Why! her caprice, for sure, for this golden curled youth whom you speak of, this Carlo, whom Paris for a little season has taken to calling a genius. Cléopâtre is very famous, very rich, very powerful, she can afford such fancies! and she laughs to see all her princes and nobles so mad because she will for a while look at none but this painter.’

‘But she—she—’ the words died on Madelon’s mouth; she leaned against the wooden shaft of the lodge door, and her breath came in painful gasps.

‘Well! — she what?’ chuckled the negress. ‘She can afford such a caprice once in a while, I tell you. Her world will only be the madder for her when she shall have tired of her young yellow-haired god, and that will be before the last summer roses are dead. He was hard to conquer, look you; he had a horror of her at the first, he shunned her, and fled from her, and that set her harder on this fancy to beat him. She will have no man look on her face and keep sane. So she set him to paint her portrait—you can see the thing now in Paris; it has taken him three months to do; and she would have it painted in the noon hours, at her own dwelling, that is all marble, they say, and

gold, with purple couches, and strange plants, and all the floors of silver. Well—well—he went, and before the painting was one half done the world only held for him that one woman. It is always so with them all. And now it is her caprice, I tell you, to have none but him near her; whenever she goes abroad he is by her; and he seldom or never leaves her roof except with her. It is a base life?—oh, well, that is as it may be. I think he has shame of it,—bitter shame sometimes, but he is drunk with it, as it were; he has no will but hers. He would fling himself in the river at a sign from her.’

Madelon leaned heavily against the timber of the door, her eyes closed, her mouth panted for breath, under her clear pale skin the veins looked black.

The old negress looked at her, and seemed to take a cruel pleasure in the misery she saw she dealt.

‘He is your brother, may be? Well,—you will scarce get him out of the hold of Cléopâtre. Till her fancy slackens, at least!—and then he will be little worth getting. Last autumn she had a like caprice for Hugo Cabarrus, the composer. They all said he was the man of the future,—just as they

say of this Carlos,—how did he end when she had played with him a season and spent her will on him? Why—shot himself through the head one night, after burning the score of his great opera, that they said would have ranked him with Rossini. She has done something the same with a score.'

'And such a woman lives!'

The words broke with a shriek from Madelon—the only utterance she ever gave to all the agony within her.

The negress grinned.

'Lives! She will live every hour of her life, however long it be. There is not a second that she does not enjoy. Look at her great, brown, sleepy, scornful eyes! No one ever sees them change, and how they smile at you poor fools that fret yourselves with sorrow!'

Madelon put out her hands with a piteous gesture as though praying peace; then, tottering like a woman quite worn out with age, she turned across the threshold, and passed again into the streets.

She had forgotten me: I followed her closely in and out a winding maze of roads. I think she had no sense nor knowledge where she went.

The day was wholly dying now. It was scarce-

ly any cooler ; and the great furnace glow in the west had the same red of Egypt in it that burned in that accursed picture, and made the very marble of the houses flush to colour, and gave the faces of the women all a weird and fevered look.

She wandered aimlessly, stunned with this one grief that left her no other memory than itself. None noted her ; a pale, dust-stained, weary-footed woman, without beauty and with poor raiment, there was nothing to mark her from the crowds that parted to let her pass through them, without so much as noticing the agony upon her face.

Once or twice a moan broke from her ; but it was too low to reach any ear in those busied and heedless throngs.

The great doors of an old church stood open ; within all was cool, and dark, and silent. She sought its shadow, instinctively ; turning aside from the red hot glow, and the whitened glare, and the sea of shifting and unpitying faces.

She dragged her tired limbs into a distant corner of the place where one little silver star of light burned before a picture of the Mater Dolorosa.

There she fell on her knees,—and at last wept.

It was quite night when the peal of the choir

aroused her, and she crept forth from her shelter once more into the streets.

‘Ma mère!’ she muttered, as she raised me in her arms; her face was calm again, and the long habits of self-sacrifice and self-control had made her remember that her old mother would be ere that time waiting, and watching, in doubt and anxiety for her long-delayed return.

The church was in a rich and famous quarter of the city; though so still, and gray, and old, the tide of gayest and of wildest life surged round it; the broad highway in which it stood was brilliantly illumined, and the buildings that flanked and fronted it were all ablaze with light likewise, and bright with floating banners and with gilded balconies.

As Madelon went out, from under the dark porch, all this radiance seemed to blind and to confuse her: she covered her eyes with her hand and gazed upward with the helpless look of those that are stricken sightless.

Straightway, in front and above her, was a square balconied window, open to the night. The balcony was of stone, and juttred out, canopied with amber silk, and filled with leaf and blossom;

there was a strong light within that poured out through the yellow draperies into the street beneath, and in that light there leaned two forms ; one that of a woman, who was carelessly thrown against the cushions, and carelessly watched the movement of the shadowy crowd below ; the other that of a man who in his turn watched her, with all that passionate ecstasy, that rapt worship in his gaze, which none ever see in a man’s eyes but once. And where he bent above her, half shadowed in the curtain’s shelter, he stooped his head, till his lips touched the fragrant hair that loosely lay upon her shoulders.

The woman, not changing her position, smiled, and let her broad, calm, dreamy eyes rest unmoved upon the crowd beneath.

Then she stretched out her arm, that had one great eastern bangle of dead gold upon it, and pointed to the portico of the church :

‘ See ! There is your poor fool,’ she said, with the same calm scorn upon her smiling mouth. ‘ Will you go to her ?—*now ?* ’

Why did this woman, who had every earthly gift and grace, and every joy in absolute possession, thus set herself to the destruction of a creature, innocent, obscure, neglected, who had never harmed

or crossed her? I cannot tell—there are women who love to murder, and women against whom all innocence is crime.

The brutal mockery of the words galvanized Madelon into sudden consciousness. She raised herself erect, and looked straight up at the broad golden casement, with its blaze of colour.

She was a proud, pure, brave-hearted creature, and she found strength in that moment to give back scorn for scorn.

He, leaning there over the white shoulder of his wicked witch, and gazing whither she pointed, met that full, upward look of unutterable rebuke, and of unchangeable forgiveness.

Their eyes rested on one another.

Carlos, seeming to lose all courage and comeliness, as under some stroke of sorcery, shivered, and covered his face with his hands, and shrank back into the abyss of blazing light behind him.

Madelon passed onward with a steady step, and with her hands clenched upon the ivory cross above her heart.

The shadow of the church had screened her from the view of her destroyer before the time that she staggered and fell down upon the stones of the great

city, as Ben Dare had fallen in the market-place of the little northern burgh.

A sweet gay burst of riotous music broke over the crowds and through the summer night. It came from the open windows of the house where Carlos had made his choice to dwell.





CHAPTER II.

IN THE QUARTER OF THE POOR.

THE first thing that I remember subsequently, was the loosening of some violent pressure about my throat, and a rush of blood through my head and throat that made me blind and dizzy.

When I fully recovered consciousness, I found myself in a small low place crowded with innumerable flowers, dead and living, which filled it with an intense odour that recalled to me, till I shuddered, the beautiful flower-filled road of the Infiorata all covered with a sea of gorse, and roses, and wild thyme, and snowy cistus buds, and all fair summer things that grew ; that road on which in Italy I had

been hunted and stoned, and singed with torches, and beaten with sticks, and kicked from side to side, in the common fashion at that poetic religious rite.

A boy with a pale sympathetic face leaned over me; a woman of noble stature stood beside me. She was silent; he was speaking eagerly to a withered old man in a blue blouse.

‘So the little dog bit, and tore, and foamed, and raged, grandpère,’ he was saying, ‘because they would move him from this poor sick woman who had fallen there, and whom they wanted to carry to the hospital; and the gendarmes bore her off upon a litter, saying she was not dead, only senseless, and they kicked the dog amongst the crowd because it strove to follow them. Then the people shrieked that it was dangerous, and mad; and they called out to one another that it should be killed; and a soldier caught it and twisted a bit of cord about its throat. He was for stringing it up straightway to the lamp-iron; and would have done it too, but that madame stayed his hand, and bade him not be so brutal to fidelity, and forced him to give up the little beast, and put it in my hands for me to bring here; and the cord was tied so tightly, I could not loose it till I came home to get a knife. I do not think the dog

has any harm in it ; it was not mad, it was only faithful.'

'Fidelity is madness,' muttered the woman, wearily, as she turned to the old man. 'The dog is innocent enough. Let it stay here ; it will be a pleasure to your grandson.'

'As madame pleases,' murmured the man, not best pleased himself, but respectfully submissive as to one he honoured and obeyed.

The woman passed up some narrow, dark, crooked stairs, in which a little dusky oil-lamp was burning ; and the boy followed her until they reached a chamber in the roof. It was a small bare attic, clean as any brown stone that lies in bright brook-water ; but without any sort of ornament, or indeed any sort of comfort.

The boy talked to me, stroked me, and made me a little bed of straw in one corner of the garret ; the woman seemed to have forgotten both his presence and mine as she laid aside her out-door garments, and went to a table under the lattice, where she seated herself at some kind of work :—what, I could not see.

'May I leave him with you, madame ?' the boy asked, after a time, when his efforts to make me eat

of some bread and milk were all unavailing. 'He moans and whines—I suppose for that poor woman—and grandpère might not like him down below with Tambour.'

'Yes, leave him, Rémy,' she answered him absently; and the boy went out, closing the door softly.

I supposed from what they had said that my efforts to serve Madelon had been futile, and that I was severed from her in all likelihood for ever. For several days and nights I mourned unceasingly with restless, feverish grief, refusing to be comforted: the woman bore with me, and was good to me in her silent, passionless, weary manner; and the gentle-hearted boy did his utmost to console me.

He was the grandson of the old herbalist in the little shop below; a kindly, tender-natured child. They were quite poor people; and the various chambers of the old, dull, antique dwelling were let by them to persons no richer than themselves; penniless students and labouring women who lived on black bread and bitter coffee, and studied or toiled early and late, and seemed only to exist to carry on that endless warfare with starvation and ruin which is all that the very poor know the word of life to mean.

I saw but little of the boy, for a few weeks later he went away to some religious place, where he was in training to be made a priest,—poor gentle child, who gave his birthright of the future up in such pathetic ignorance of his immeasurable loss. The old man I rarely encountered; he was learned in simples and other herbal lore, and passed all his time in studying, when he was not vending his shrubs, and herbs, and flowers. Thus I was left entirely to the woman who had saved me from the hangman's cord. This woman was called Madame Reine.

Whether this were in truth her name, or whether it was but one she had adopted for the purposes of her life in Paris, I could not tell; the people of the place she dwelt in knew, I think, nothing of her. She lived quite alone, and seemed never to seek to hold any sort of social intercourse with any one of those around her.

Only to those who were aged, or such as were in trouble, she was always merciful; with that noble, silent, unceasing charity of action, which so often, amongst the poor, supplies the place of that charity of alms, which poverty denies them the power to show to one another.

Herself, she gained a barren living by continual

hard toil. She modelled in leather (or, rather, carved the leather as a delicate wood-carver does his wood) for a Palais Royal house that dealt largely in such things, but paid for them grudgingly.

She did the work marvellously well ; she could imitate in it the most perfect wood carving, a fern leaf, a dead woodcock, a branch of pine, a water lily on its green raft of leaves,—she would execute these, or any other similar thing, in leather until the keenest eye could scarce have told the work from a most delicate and exquisite oak carving. But it was a slow and toilsome labour ; the single feather of a bird would take two hours in its execution, even more ; and the wage for them was exceedingly small, beautiful though they were.

She was all day long at this species of sculpture, sitting at the little deal table, with her tools, under the single small square lattice in the roof : and the life was very dull for me.

There was no sort of change from dawn to sunset. My heart was heavy for all those whom I had lost. It seemed to me that life was but a sequence of tender ties, formed only to be ruptured, and leave the torn heart aching. I missed, moreover, the glad, sweet, summer season in the open air ; the free-

dom of the old fruit-gardens and flower-covered ways; the homely, happy sounds of all the stirring bees and chirring birds, of the ducks in the dark cool pond, and the lowing cattle in the poplar-belted meadows.

This little garret was very clean, indeed; but it was bare, and dull, and lonesome, exceedingly. The scents of a city made hot and sulphurous the winds that blew in through the lattice; and, all the hours through, there came up from the streets below the one unceasing muttering of wheels, and cries, and drums, and engines, and all the ceaseless noise of men. It was a quiet ancient quarter, it is true; but the quietest quarter of a city, after the lull of country silence, makes you know all that your poet meant when he wrote of 'the ear that *aches* with sound.'

Of Madelon I never heard.

But once, whilst the boy Rémy was still in the house, and when he took me with him across the bridges to the old green Luxembourg gardens, as he was wont to do in the pleasant evening time when all Paris was out in the sunset hour, I saw a carriage with scarlet liveries and fretting horses and gay harness all hung with noisy silver bells, and I heard

the people round us say to one another—‘there is Cléopâtre.’

And as it went through the white gilded streets and the green lines of leafy trees, and the air that was bright, half with the gleam of the lamps, and half with the glare of the sunset, her face came fully in my sight, lit with that evening light, and I knew her then,—knew her entirely; as that memory stood out clear and fixed before me, which had haunted me, though vague and troubled, when I had gazed at the picture of Egypt.

Carlos Merle was not with her: beside her sat a dark, slender, gypsy-eyed man, whom the crowds about named, whilst he passed, to one another, as a Prince of some Danubian province, fabulously rich, who had lavished on her black sable skins, and diamonds, and opals, and strange byzantine things of untold worth.

And my heart was sick for Carlos. For it seemed to me that already somewhere in that hot, brilliant, amber-coloured, magnolia-scented summer night, the last rays of the setting-sun were seeking out his colourless face and weary body in some haunt of death; while she, the Faustine, the Assassina-tress, the Hell-born, was gathering up her skirts,

heavy with the golden wage of infamy, and fleeing, with the wicked laugh upon her face, to passion, and to pleasure, and to riotous mirth, and to the witches' sabbath of the senses.

I longed to seek for him. Alas! what could I do?—a little, powerless, insignificant dog; dragged along with a cord over the asphalte; kicked aside by the hurrying happy throngs that went trooping to theatre and dance-garden; deafened by the music that swelled from the open-air concerts where the soldiers were playing; terrified by the savage glance and word of the gilded and belted gendarmes; and glad to hide, trembling, beneath the chairs of the gay indifferent people who sat before the café doors, and ate their ices, and laughed, and cried, 'Holà! there is Cléopâtre!'

Ah, I wonder if you ever think of the woe that it is to us, that utter inability to serve or to aid those we love?

The life was dreary:—To watch the stiff brown sheep-skin gradually moulded under the worker's hands into the semblage of some drooping, lifeless, moorland bird, or some lovely curl of clematis flowers, was all the distraction that I had. I was thankful—since ingratitude is a human monopoly—for my

bodily safety, for my corporeal welfare ; thankful that I was not beaten, nor starved, nor chained. But I was very sad. I had lost all my friends into the night of an unknown fate ; and I could not forget—for I was a dog.

The sole interest that this existence awakened in me was an interest in this woman who had delivered me from death. I wondered about her ceaselessly.

Her garments were of black and very worn, but they clung about a form fit for a sculptor's dream of a Greek goddess ; her hands were for ever working at the manual toil by which her scanty bread was gained, but they were long and white and slender ; her face was very worn and attenuated as though with infinite want and sorrow, and there were silver threads amongst the luxuriance of her hair, but the shape of her head and throat were haughty and full of stag-like grace, and the eyes were still wondrously beautiful, though the lids were so swollen above, and the shadows were so dark beneath them.

She had a look that was very far above the place in which she dwelt, and the poor people of the tenement. Although she lived more poorly

still than many of them, and never appeared to hold herself greater in any way, they yet treated her with a curious reverence, and called her Madame with more of courteous meaning than always lies in the common term. I was ashamed to fret at the monotony and obscurity of my own existence, when I saw how utterly joyless and cheerless her days were.

To a woman like this, who must once have been of rare beauty, and who evidently had a proud nature and a delicate taste, the manner of her life must have been almost intolerable. She rose at dawn to go to the little work-table under the lattice ; she rarely ate anything save some thin soup, some coffee, and some poor rye bread ; she saw no one unless it were some creature, yet poorer than herself, who came to her door for an aid that she never refused ; she rarely went forth save very early to sell what she had modelled, or to obtain the bough, the fruit, or the dead bird that she needed to copy in her dried-skin carving.

I was sometimes with Tambour, the dog in the place below ;—that little flower-shop of herbs and plants and roses and immortelles that smelt fragrantly always, and gave a lovely flush of colour in

the dark and crowded passage-way;—and he told me some few things of her.

He was an old brindled mastiff, very old ; so old that he remembered the Days of July, and had seen his first master shot down in his youth upon the barricades ; but he was very kind and very pitiful. All our race are. Was it not the dogs that succoured Lazarus when the rich of his own kind scorned him ?

Tambour told me that this woman Reine had dwelt with him three years, coming, he believed, from across the Alps. She had never in all that time lived differently to what she now did ; nay, she had indeed lived worse, for at first finding none who would recognize her talent in the leathern carving, nor even purchase sufficient of it to gain her money enough to buy sheep-skins and birds for models, she had been forced for some six or seven months to earn her daily bread by the hard coarse toil of sewing the hempen shirts that the populace wore. Saving a few coins from this ill-paid labour she had been able at length to obtain the materials which she needed, for her art, and had succeeded in obtaining also a market for that art at a shop in the Galérie d'Orléans.

‘Why that woman works so I cannot think,’ said the old dog to me, where we rested together under the little low ceiling of the flower-shop, among the quantities of broom, and lilies, and roses, and sweet herbs, that lay dying sadly here in the heat and dust and turmoil of the city; flowers sick with longing for the cool touch of the dew, as your hearts get faint with longing for the freshness of truth in the fever and the falsehood of the world. ‘I cannot think. Why does she not set a pan of charcoal in her chamber one quiet night, and make an end of all this toil for ever? Julio did that,—here in this very house. And he was only twenty. He was a Bordelais: he was a musician: he wrote very beautiful things in music; at least they sounded so upon his violin, which he would play from dawn to midnight up in that very little garret where you live now with madame. I have seen the people in the street all gathered mute as the dead under our casements; listening—listening—ay, and sobbing like children too. It must have been good music that could move them so? I do not know why it was, but none would listen to it in Paris save these poor work-people, out of these courts and alleys, who were I suppose no good to him. Any

way I know Paris would not listen ; no one would take his opera ; not even try it. And they said—my people did—that when he went to one of the great masters this great man derided him. It might be so, men you see will not recognize that all human genius is like all sun rays, coming from the same source, and therefore the same light, whether shining on Europe or Cathay, whether beaming on a king's diamond or on a cotter's tuft of daisies. No,—they are so feebly and so foolishly jealous. The setting sun denies the sun that rises ! Well, Julio could get no hearing ; and he was exceeding poor ; and the hunger of him killed his soul ; and, rather than sink down into this soulless, sightless, bitter life, he chose to die. They found him dead one morning : his breath stifled by the fire-fumes that were kinder than men's neglect. Why does not this woman do the same ?'

'Perhaps she thinks it a sin ?' I suggested, for I knew that Madelon, or Ben Dare, would have held it to be so.

'Perhaps,' assented Tambour. 'It may be one. We always endure, you know ; we never slay ourselves. Yet it seems strange—how she can go on with that dreary life. All these three years no

friend has ever visited her. No letter has ever come to her. It must be worse than death to be utterly forgotten, to be utterly alone, like that? However, I fancy it will not last much longer. That woman is marked to die.'

'To die?'

'Yes. Hark at her cough. Look at the flush in those hollow cheeks. See how weak she is when she rises in the morning. She is marked to die; and that soon.'

I shuddered: it seemed terrible.

'You are unwise,' said the old French dog. 'Very unwise: if you wish the woman well. What is life to her? a burden borne for duty's sake alone. She will be as glad to lay it down as a hunted bird is to sink into its nest. There has come a certain peace upon her face of late; I think it has come because she knows death near.'

'But she is young still?'

'Ah! what does that matter? I have seen a girl of seventeen years thankful to die; her beloved one had been slaughtered in the African raids, and for her the whole world was laid desolate because that one poor soldier was dead, in a nameless grave. You do not understand men and women much: they

are very curious in that. They are at once the most selfish and unselfish, the most sublime and the most sordid, of all created things. See!—one of their women will kill her lost lover's fresh mistress rather than let him be happy through another, and then kill herself because she cannot endure to exist without him! There is not the slightest sense in any of their actions; but there are continually the most wonderful egotism, and the most marvellous martyrdom, side by side together.'

'You think the life of Madame Reine a martyrdom?'

'Well—I do. There is the look of a woman who has *renounced* upon her face. It is she who has forsaken the world; not the world that has forsaken her.'

'There is a difference, then?'

'A difference! The Poles are not wider asunder. Look you—I was once a convent dog. It was the happiest time of my life. I never went beyond the garden walls it is true; but then the garden was so large, it was like a little kingdom. I was there six years; years of perfect peace. My only office was to guard the convent fruit from marauding children who would, undaunted by the sanctity of the place,

climb the high walls at twilight for sake of the bursting plums and luscious peaches. The nuns made a favourite of me ; and I came to know them all perfectly well. The greater number by far were women whom the world had abjured ; whom nature, denying beauty, or love, or sweetness, or some other gracious charm of living, had driven to this solitude ; or who, disappointed of marriage or ambition, or of whatever desire their souls were set on, had come thither because nought else was possible to them. But, again, there were a few whom the world would fain have kept ; women gifted, beautiful, victorious, who had been beloved and tempted ; who came of their own will to a self-chosen sacrifice ; laying down out of their hands the glory, or the passion, or the homage they enjoyed. Now, of these first women the look was always regret, discontent, sadness, helplessness : but of these latter women it was always half conquest, and half captivity : an agony indeed. And that is the look this woman Reine has on her face ; and death with it, as theirs mostly had.'

And then he would compose himself to sleep under the yellow plumes of the broom, and the sheaves of great white lilies, and dream, I doubt not,

that he was once more amongst the deep unshaven grasses and the drowsy shadowy ways of his old convent-garden.

This talk of his moved me to quicker and more curious interest than I might otherwise have felt in this lonely, proud, weary woman, who had stood between me and the hangman's cord. There was a strange fascination, too, about her; a fascination that seemed the stronger now that he had shown me that death was hourly stealing the cunning from her hand, and the brilliance from her eyes.

There seemed in that mute, haughty, passionate, colourless face, so eloquent a story of a soul so hard to crush, of hopes so hard to die, of a spirit so hard to break; a story of strong love, of strong powers, of strong woes, of strong will, that had fought so bitter a battle with fate, and at the end been worsted.

It seemed an idle fancy, of a woman who modelled, in a garret, woodcocks, and ferns, and wild vine-clusters for the *Galérie d'Orléans*: yet I could not help believing that she had once been famous in the blaze of the world's light.

Once, one twilight, Tambour and I were lying underneath the lilies; the beautiful pure lilies that the flower-girls bore forth every evening to

perish in the gas glare of the streets and cafés, as women take their innocence and honour to wither in the corruption of base sins and venal vices.

There was more stir than usual in the little place that night; there were eager voices, and sobs and laughter, and flushed wondering faces, all pressed together in the light of the little single oil-lamp, whose feeble rays struggled through the dusk of evening. In the centre of the breathless groups was a girl of one of the adjacent houses. Her name was Mariquità. She was of Cordovan-Jewish blood, though Paris born, the daughter of a poor fruit-vender, who dwelt under the tawny leathern awning of the melon and grape stall opposite.

The girl was handsome, and of a vivacious, electric, untameable temper; she had a voice too, mellow, sweet, far reaching, and a form as lithe as a serpent's.

She stood, the centre of the excited crowd, with her brown arms outstretched, and her whole body quivering beneath her picturesque rags, and her black eyes full of fire, and her white teeth glittering with an hysterical laugh of joy. Evidently some great joy or wonder had just come to her, in which the sympathetic crowd was sharing;

for Mariquità, despite her gusts of passion and her lioness-like rage, was a favourite with the people of her quarter, by reason of her beauty and her keen and witty tongue.

As Tambour and I, roused from slumber by their cries and exclamations, lifted our heads and watched them, wondering what had chanced, Madame Reine entered the shop; which was the only passage from the little street without to the staircase of the dwelling which led to the garret which she occupied. She had been out on one of the two only missions which ever took her forth; either the sale of her carvings, to the *Galérie d'Orléans*, or a visit of charity to some dying or ailing creature.

She paused beside Mariquità, who was, in a manner, favoured even by her; Mariquità, tameless to all others, had ever been docile to her, and had always shown a curious attachment and veneration for her.

‘What hast thou, Mariquità?’ she asked, arrested by the girl’s aspect, and by the excitement of the little throng that filled all the dark den, whose only light came from the colours of dying flowers, as the only poetry of your world comes from the sadness of ruined lives.

The girl flashed her glowing eyes upon the weary face of the woman who questioned her.

‘Madame, Madame!’ she cried breathlessly, the words coursing each other off her lips. ‘Madame! my fortune is made—my fame is made! I shall be great—great, only think! The director of the Ambigu has seen me and has talked with me, and says that I have the genius of Rachel in me, and that if I will serve him, and him only, for five years, he will bring me out before Paris, and make me the talk of all the world, because I have the three sole things that women want for greatness,—beauty, and passion, and voice! Oh, look! it has come at last,—the chance for Paris to hear me, to see me, to know me. And I have it in me to conquer them; I feel it; I fear nothing, I heed nothing, I hark to nothing—only to this surety in me that tells me I shall be great—great—great!’

She was a ragged Jewish girl; she spoke in the tongue of the populace; she had lived all her short life under the yellow leathern awning, selling the slices of water-melon, and the handful of roast chestnuts, in which her father dealt. But for all that there was the fire of truth in her, and none who heard doubted that her self-prophecy came,

not of vanity, but of vision.

Over the face and form of the woman who heard her—of the woman to whom the world was dead—there passed a curious and terrible change. She trembled and recoiled, and seemed to sicken, as one might do who saw the grave of some lost and beloved thing suddenly forced, and flung open, by an alien hand.

‘Great, great!’ she muttered in her throat, while her eyes gazed, without sight or sense in them, at the dilated triumphant form of the young girl. ‘Great! Ah, God! I dreamed just such a dream,—once!’

Then, without seeming to have any memory or knowledge of those about her, she moved mechanically forward, and up the familiar stairway into the darkness of the steep and gloomy shaft: away from the rays of the little lamp, away from the fragrance of the fading flowers.

The group around Mariquità looked after her, suddenly checked in their riotous wonder and joyous felicitations; they dimly saw, that in some vague way they had touched and struck the broken chord of this silent life, whose melody was gone for ever.

The young Israelite stood, hushed, and afraid.

‘Will it be so with me, ever?’ she murmured, and her head sunk on her bosom, and the light died out from her face.

I stole up the stairs into the desolate chamber in the roof, where the woman who had succoured me had passed alone.

In the faint reflection from the sunset in the evening skies that still lingered here, above, though darkness brooded in the street below, I saw her kneeling as I had seen Madelon kneel in those weary summer nights which had closed the days that had failed to bring her Carlos.

But Madelon’s hands had clasped her crucifix : this woman’s hands were empty.

From that day her health declined more rapidly and visibly. Her weakness increased, so that she could scarcely move from her chamber. She would drag herself wearily from her bed to the table where her work stood, and strive to model some feather, or leaf, or blossom ; and then would let fall the tool she held, and sink down from absolute exhaustion.

She could eat little ; and the hard tasteless food she had was ill fitted to tempt appetite. She coughed continually, and her hands were wasted and diaphanous.

It was touching to see the poor people of her quarter bringing some little fruit, a golden peach, or a leaf full of mulberries, and begging her to taste it for their sakes. They had grown to hold her in great reverence and affection, sad, and silent, and proud though her aspect was; and they knew that only for a very little longer could this stranger tarry with them there. To her the young Jewess devoted herself with a passionate attachment: Mariquità seldom spoke, but she would watch for her every want with her great radiant wistful eyes; and would crouch on the floor sleepless and motionless through all the night; and would never tire, or be tempted from her side. Once or twice she brought some clear crystals of ice; some golden luscious wine; some clusters of violet grapes; the dying woman looked at them and murmured some wonder as to whence these costly things could come. Mariquità grew red under her soft brown skin, and muttered hurriedly of gifts made to her father.

But 'Tambour whispered to me.

‘Look you. She has not that golden sequin that she always wore on the silk cord round her throat, the only ornament she had. She has bartered it I

doubt not to get the ice and the wine in exchange.'

And neither do I doubt that the girl had done so, though the golden coin had been the pride of her eyes and the delight of her soul; an amulet of potent charm, no less than a jewel of price, in her sight.

Mariquità again and again urged her to see some physician. She always refused.

'What use?' she would reply; 'no skill can cure consumption. And, if such skill even there were, I would not employ it.'

This was all she ever said in reference to herself, or to the death which she knew to be so near. Usually silent previously, she had sunk now into almost perfect apathy, although the same desolate calm, the same proud serenity, that had always characterized her, were with her still. There was this difference only, that whereas before she had seemed a woman to whom no hope of any sort was possible, she had now this one certainty of death, which was release. Where the look in her eyes had been agony, it was now resignation.

Several months had passed with me here. Autumn was deepening into winter. The only plants in

the flower-shop beneath were the immortelles and the wreaths of ivy leaves for tombs. All the rest were pods and seeds, withered foliage, and sheaves of dried herbs, that gave forth a curious faint odour like the scent of herbs that are laid beside the dead in coffins.

Paris around, doubtless, was awakening to its utmost gaiety, its wildest whirl of pleasure; but here we knew nothing of it—we only knew that bread would be dearer, and that the very aged, and the very young, would soon perish of cold, and that wood would be scarce for the stove, and that in the little chamber under the roof there lay a woman dying.

Ah! that is all the poor ever do know of what there is on earth. That there is pain, and there is cold, and there is death.

With other things they have no part nor portion.

And all the while I shivered in the dreary attic that was scarce warmed at all by the little fuel that alone was burnt in it; and pondered ceaselessly and longingly of all those whom I had known and lost; and wondered if in truth I could have ever really been the little gay white creature, happy and playful, and prettily proud, that had been caressed by

the hands of fair women, and praised by the voices of nobles.

One day, one very chill dark day, in that drear winter-time, I sat huddled beside the bed. The embers had quite died in the stove; the gray December light struggled feebly through the scant inlets of the lattice; the strong scents of the herbs came up the stairs like the odours of sepulchres. Mariquità was perforce absent, gone to her task-master, who was to give her fame as wages. Madame Reine, half raised upon the hard narrow pallet that served her as her couch, had drawn some letters from beneath her pillow, and was reading them—very slowly—one by one.

She had been weaker that day than any heretofore. All the night through convulsions had shaken her wasted form; and the hemorrhage of the lungs been only stayed by the ice that the Jewish girl had held to her parched lips. Although I had never beheld death, it seemed to me that there could not be many more hours to her life; it seemed that very soon this mute, desolate, proud existence, without a history, without a friend, without a lament, or a sigh of self-pity, must end, and take its secrets and its sorrows to the silence of the grave.

The letters were many, and were hours in her hand; tears had long been scorched dry in her dark weary eyes, but as she read them, one by one, the anguish was upon her face that I had seen on Madelon's when she had heard that her lover dwelt in the house of Cléopâtre.

They were letters in a man's hand; letters doubtless in which a man's heart had been spent in all a man's frank and honest passion.

When the last had been read by her the day was done; the light was well-nigh spent; the evening shadows were long and dark within the chamber. She dragged herself, with slow laborious effort, from her bed to where the scant wood burned in the poor cold stove, and crouched down before it, and slowly thrust one of the letters amongst the fuel.

Her own secret she could take with her to her grave, but his she could not: she would not leave it for another's eyes to learn.

One by one the letters were drawn within the heat and the smoke, and curled, and crumbled, and fell away, a little heap of ashes. And to her it was even as though, with each, her own life consumed and passed away in fire; even as her years had

perished in the furnace of the past, so perished these records of a passion that was dead.

They were all her hold on life ; all the bonds that still bound her to some old sweet unforgotten time ; all the ties that still held her to some divinest season when she had known of joy ; all the witness that still told her she also once had lived.

When the last letter alone remained she paused—so long that the cold white moon of winter rose and shone in through the lattice in the roof. She waited, as the suicide may wait ere he drives home the thrust that shall kill memory in him for ever, and make him dumb, and still, and senseless, as the earth that will yawn open to receive his corpse.

It was quite night, the moon was high and full, and the chamber was dark as a grave, when at last she stretched out her hand and let the cruel fire take those living, breathing, throbbing words of a love that wrote itself as deathless ; and burn them, as time burns passion till it dies ; and leave them there, a little coil of wind-blown, silent, hueless ashes.

Then, as though her own life indeed went out with theirs, her hands moved feebly as though seeking some other hand to hold them ; her great

dark eyes gazed upward as though searching for some other look in answer; a convulsive shudder moved her once—only once—then stretching her arms out wearily, in the darkness and the solitude and the silence of the night, she bowed her head, and died.





CHAPTER III.

A TORN LETTER.

THEY buried her in the quarter of the poor. They had loved her, these people, and they would not leave her in her death to chance, or charity. They did what they could to honour her in her grave ; and the Jewish girl, weeping passionately, and refusing to be comforted, laid on that nameless grave the earliest white-ladies that bloomed, pure and spotless, out of the winter-snows.

Amongst the trifles of her daily work, of the art that she had prosecuted, they found a written fragment in her handwriting, a sheet of paper torn obliquely, seeming to be a letter that she had penned upon her dying bed, and then had half-

destroyed, in doubt whether or no to leave it to speak for her to some other when her voice should be for ever silent.

The fragment was this—many words probably had preceded it.

‘It is selfish to send you this ; when I am dead it can but rend your heart, if your heart still holds a place for me. And yet I feel that I must write to you this one last word,—must bid you know why, why only, I fled from you. Oh God, you cannot doubt why it was, surely !

‘I left all, I lost all, when I gave up the world for you. I had vanquished them. I had vindicated my own powers. I had reached success, if not fame ; I had talents, if not genius ; I had touched celebrity and brilliancy, and wealth and pleasure ; I had learnt how sweet the praise of the world can be ; I had tasted how precious is the homage of watching eyes and listening ears : and I gave it up all—all—for you. Only for you. It was not my duty as a wife, he had forfeited all claim to it. It was not my honour as a woman, you were dearer to me than that. It was neither of

those that made me leave you to think me dead so long. No :—it was for your sake alone.

‘It seems such a little thing for a woman to give her life up to love ; and it is little, truly, so little that do you think I should have paused one moment out of selfish fear ? But it is a great thing for a man—a terrible thing ;—a thing not less than ruin.

‘You and I have known the world—have we seen any fate less deadly to a man than that surrender of himself to the wife of another, in an union that has all the bondage, and none of the honour, of marriage. And the sweeter, the truer, the more loyal the man’s nature, the worse is the bondage for him.

‘It was not because I doubted you that I dared not become your mistress : it was because I trusted you so utterly. You loved me with such noble and perfect love ; you would have surrendered your life to mine as indemnity for what you would have thought my sacrifice ; you would have held that the world’s scorn gave me upon you a claim fast as iron, imperishable, eternal. You would never more have been free ; and I—I, oh my love ! should have been your gaoler, your injurer, your curse.

‘I had strength to save you from myself—from yourself; to set my will for your sake between your passion and my own Will you understand this? you must at least believe. Since for it I have lost all.

‘Do not seek to learn how have I lived: it has been by simple hand-labour alone.

‘The mock passions, the counterfeit woes, the mimicked embraces, of the stage seemed profanation to me when once you had looked into my eyes. Moreover, had I remained before the world, I could not have been withdrawn from your sight, your voice, your presence; and women are so weak, I could not have been sure an hour of my strength.

‘It was for you—for you alone. I knew so well the loyal knightly sweetness of your nature; I knew so well that you would have deemed yourself mine till death; I knew so well how it would have ended—the old, old history!—when some higher, happier, purer love should have arisen to you, and I—your mistress—should have stood between you and all fair things of innocence and honour.

Will you believe?—My God! you *must*! For you I have borne worse than death;—for you I have

killed myself in my youth, my beauty, my power, my victory ;—for you I have died, and yet have kept the agony of life awake in me ; yet in my grave have I heard the laughter of the happy world, and all the glad and busy sounds of earth. Will ever woman love you as I have loved ? No—never, never, never !’

There the words ceased, and the paper was torn asunder, as though, when she had written these, she had feared to send them to him lest in them she should leave a legacy of pain, lest by them she should deal the stroke that she so long had spared, lest through them any sort of selfish pity, any breath of unconscious rebuke, should seem to him to linger in her dying memory of him.

Mariquità took the torn sheet, and caused it to be read aloud to her by some Jew of the quarter who understood the English character in which it had been penned. She heard it with wondering eyes, all ablaze with fire, and yet all dimmed with tears ; then she folded the paper reverently, and laid it within a little curious leathern locket that she owned ; and thrust it within her bosom.

‘Some day I may meet him,’ she muttered to herself; and she went on her way with the first snowdrops of the year to that nameless grave in the quarter of the poor.





CHAPTER IV.

‘THE CHILD GLADYS.’

FOR a brief space afterwards I remained in the little flower-shop. Mariquità vehemently implored for permission to possess herself of me, entreating, and commanding, and execrating, and conjuring all in one breath, in her own impetuous volcanic fashion, but all her prayers were useless. The time had not come for her to have entered on the career that looked to her the high road of glory and of affluence; she was exceedingly poor; and she had nothing to offer for me save a few old battered centime pieces. The florist shrugged his shoulders and answered that I was of value; that he had a right to me, as his dead lodger

had cost him more than she had paid (this I am certain was untrue), and that he should keep me until he could make an advantageous sale. All the low cunning and the hungry avarice of the low French nature had awakened in him, without any other counteracting influence to combat it, now that the one woman was gone towards whom he had felt forced to yield a certain reverent submission. So I remained; dull, weary, spiritless, ill fed, ill cared for; knowing no moments of pleasure except when the Jewish girl would beg me for an hour, and warm me beside the little stove at which her father roasted his sweet chestnuts, and sit with me under the broad old red weather-stained umbrella that in winter replaced the tawny awning of spring and summer. But these times were few and far between, for Mariquità went daily now to the theatre, at which she was to acquire the rudimentary grace and science of that Art which, as seen in her marvellous visions, was to make her meet with the empresses of the earth.

I did not seek to run away, though I was miserable. I had acquired that sad knowledge which the young are so rebellious against—that there are things worse even than a dreary and

desolate monotony. I had known the lash, the goad, the life of the public toy, the endless labour of an ever-renewing task ; and I knew that there were worse fates than to see the days and the nights drift dully by, sitting amongst the stores of evergreens and the pale winter roses, even as men and women, when their life is done, sit amidst deathless memories and faint sickly hopes.

Awhile earlier I should have rebelled passionately against this colourless and weary existence ; but now I knew that not actively to suffer is almost, in this life we lead, the nearest approach we get to joy. So I took the broken crusts and the begrudged shelter, and the chilly hearth where the stove was cold ; and tried hard to be thankful because the snow-flakes could not cover me, and the hail could not pelt me, and the shivering mountebanks, who came into the quarter of the poor to dance on the icy ground and to shake their spangles in the blue hard frost, could not seize me as a brother and claim me as a slave.

‘ Ah, little one ! shall we ever *live*, thou and I ? ’ cried Mariquità to me one day, rebelling in her wayward youth against the poor barren life of hardship and of solitude that she led at her

father’s fruit stall. She might, I knew—for she was a woman, and beautiful, and to such the apple of life will ever be tossed if they do not mind the black speck at its core of dishonour. But to me it seemed that never more could mirth or joy return.

Yet, as often chances, I think, in this life, both were nearest to me when I deemed them farthest. The time came when the old man sold me; sold me just as the new year began. I was now so sick at heart, so tired, and so homeless, that indeed I cared little whither I went, nor what my fate might be. Only I dreaded, with a terror untold, the stick of Già and the little red coat of La Pipetta.

There were the usual chaffering of strange voices; some broken weeks of unrest and captivity; some misery in strange hands and binding chains; some piteous, dumb, wondering woe, that none seemed to note or care for; then there came a day of travel by land and sea, and when my cage was opened and I was loosed from it with eyes blinded by the rush of light, and senses half numbed and half maddened, I thought that I was dreaming a dream of my old dead life.

The chamber was strangely familiar. The place seemed to me like ‘a tale that is twice told.’

Its cabinets, its bookcases, its mirrors on their ground of ruby velvet, its grand piano in a half-lit recess, its single small marble statuette of the 'Gott und der Bayadere,' its exquisite copy of the 'Depart pour Cythère,' hung between photographs of Rachel and Ristori: did I dream of these in one of the many dreams of them which had haunted me among the long dry Campagna grasses, under the orchard trees of the Silver Stag, and amongst the white lilies and yellow broom of the flower-shop in Paris? Or—was I in truth once more in the supper-room of the Coronet? The door had closed behind me; I was alone. I gazed around in eagerness and amaze.

There behind the bookcase glass were the cream-hued faces of Scribe and all his brethren; there on the couch were the sealskins, and the black laces, and the painted fan of a woman; there on the table were the Majolica fruit-stands that I knew so well, and the little silver waggon that held the cigarettes, and the claret-jugs with their swan-like necks, and the quaint old flasks of Rhineland wine—yes, surely it was no dream. I was once more, after my wanderings, in the pleasant festal chamber of the unforgotten theatre:—I was once more in the old charming life of ease and fashion, where the

wheels of time were oiled with gold, and, if Care still clung behind, Pleasure at the least ran on before.

And I felt half blind with joy.

For, write as you will of the glory of poverty, and of the ennui of pleasure, there is no life like this life, wherein to the sight and the sense all things minister ; wherefrom harsh discord and all unloveliness are banished ; where the rare beauty of high-born women is common ; where the passions at their wildest still sheathe themselves in courtesy's silver scabbard ; where the daily habits of existence are made graceful and artistic ; where grief and woe, and feud, and futile longing for lost loves, can easiest be forgot in delicate laughter and in endless change. Artificial ? Ah, well—it may be so. But since nevermore will you return to the life of the savage, to the wigwam of the squaw, it is best, methinks, that the Art of Living, the great *Savoir Vivre*, should be brought, as you seek to bring all other arts, up to uttermost perfection.

I sat down, and gazed around me in a tumult of memory and of expectation. It was very still except for the roll of the carriages in the street below. In this room you never, at any time, would hear one sound to tell you that an audience of three thousand

people was shouting with applause, or shrieking with mirth, only a few feet beyond.

In this strange silence—strange, because such intensity of life was so near—I thought, I knew not why, of the boy statesman who had killed himself upon the hearth of this very chamber, to have his jewels rifled, even whilst she kissed his dead lips, by the woman for whom he perished.

Was it always thus, I wondered? Always the love, and the loyalty, and the faithfulness that suffered; and all that lived in peace and plenteousness, the Faustine, the Cléopâtre?

As I mused the door opened, and a woman entered.

Have you never seen, in life or on some old master's canvas, a beautiful child's face, fair, tender, serious even to sadness, with the golden hair cut low and square over the brow, and the dreaming eyes gazing straightly out—beyond you, very far beyond you? If you have, you have seen this woman's face as she came into the lighted chamber, with black folds of velvet sweeping after her as she moved, with that grave grace of motion which always seems to belong to other centuries; to the terraces of Marly, to the halls of Rambouillet, to the

studios of Vandyke, to the palaces of Charles the First. And which you have lost—yes, lost strangely, in this day of yours when, all lovely and thoroughbred though many of your women be, they smoke their papered cigarettes, and talk their stolen slang, bet on their gunners in a drove of grouse, and land their gasping grilse to their own line; take a double and drop like a work-woman, and ‘get on’ for a ‘good thing’ at the Craven, or the July, with a reckless audacity that never flies at anything less than four figures.

She looked at me with a smile which seemed, I thought, surety that I should have to endure from her neither harshness nor caprice.

‘What a pretty creature!’ she said as she stooped to touch me; but I stayed not for her caress; I forgot her very presence, for beyond her I saw Beltran.

Time had not dimmed my memory of him, nor had it quenched my affection; with a bark of delight I escaped through her hands and sprang on him; recalling myself to his remembrance with all the innocent arts of which I was master. He was in nowise altered, but had he been so, ever so greatly, my instinct would have been true to him.

We, who can only love dumbly, cling to the creature of our affections, no matter how time have blanced his locks, bowed his frame, shattered his whole being: you, who talk so grandly of elective affinities and the unions of souls, pass your early love in the street without knowing her, if she have but wrinkled a little; and break off your marriage troth with your lover if a shower of shot chance to change his handsome face to deformity.

He looked at me in my ecstasies with amused surprise; he had no sort of knowledge of me; but as he turned to her to speak of my value, the little collar that I wore caught his sight, and he raised me to read the inscription upon it.

The bit of metal that had been fashioned for me at the forge in the woods of the Peak, was still about my throat; it was not worth a brass coin, so none had cared to rob me of it.

If you wish to keep a thing, let it have nought to attract the eyes of others; a rule which sometimes seems to influence you too often in the selection of your wives.

His face changed as he read.

‘Puck!’ he muttered; ‘as I live, it is the same dog that belonged—’

The phrase was left unfinished ; the woman beside him turned with a flush of surprise, in which one saw how very youthful was that lovely face.

‘ Puck ! Puck ! ’ she echoed, as though my name brought, also, to her some memories. ‘ Can it be the same ? That is strange, indeed ! ’

‘ It is the same dog, oddly enough,’ said Beltran, as he gave me to her ; but there was an annoyance almost a displeasure on his face as he spoke. Whatever might be her remembrance of me, — for of her I had none,—to him evidently I bore but one association, and that the unwelcome one of Avice Dare. For me, personally, I suppose he cared nothing. Alas, for us ! it is almost ever so in the intercourse between our race and yours. Between human beings, when two measures of love are weighed out, by the hand of fate, to be mingled together in union, one scale is always light and the other always heavy : how much more so between men and dogs !

Although we spend all that we possess of loyalty and strength and courage in human service, and break our hearts oftentimes for human friends, we are seldom much loved in return. A careless touch of the hand, a rough kindly word or two now and

then, a broken crust, a tossed bone, these are payments enough for a dog : ‘ only a dog.’

Here and there a Rab will find a chronieler ; a St John will beg with his last breath that his bones be laid beside Lion’s ; a Byron will value his ‘ one friend ;’ a Walter Scott will think, amidst woe, and debt, and the exhaustion of a mortal disease, of ‘ the dogs ;’ and tombs will be raised to lost and lamented dog-comrades as in the little shadowy yew-circled cemetery of Wrest. But these exceptions are very rare. For the most part we are but little loved, little heeded, and not at all remembered.

The woman bending over me caressed me with a dreamy tenderness, as though thinking of other things that my presence brought from some past time. Her eyes seemed dim as she looked at me, with a sweet vague sadness, as for some remembered season of great woe. Beltran drew me away from her.

‘ If he bring you those memories he shall not stay. I would never have bought him if I had known—’

‘ Why ?’ she answered him, still dreamily. ‘ I shall care more for him. As for those memories—’

when do I ever forget them ? And do you think I would forget if I could ? ’

‘ I wish that you would at least. There is only one thing you can want to remember—’

‘ And what is that ? ’

‘ That you are famous now—and happy. You *are* happy ? ’

There seemed, I thought, some little doubt and vague apprehension in his question.

If there were, they must have been contented by the look in her eyes as they turned on him : a look so eloquent that it needed not in its confirmation the half sigh of joy with which her lips breathed the answer.

‘ Happy ? Ah, yes ! Happier than it can ever seem right to me to be—’

He did not ask her why this should be so,—perhaps he knew.

Almost at that moment the door of the supper-room, which they had left open to the passages beyond, was filled by the forms of five other men : three were strangers to me ; in the two others I recognized the fair features of Lord Guiliadene, and the lofty form and dark guerilla-like head of Derry Denzil. To me it seemed so marvel-

lously strange, so breathlessly bewildering, thus to be tossed back once more by the battledore of chance into the heart of these old associations and unforgotten memories that I cowered, dumb and dizzy, in a corner, wondering still if I were not dreaming all these things under the dying lilies of the florist's little den, or the golden-fruited pear-trees of Madelon's orchard.

But, with them, there appeared a presence which did assure me beyond all doubt or question that I was in the region of fact and not of fancy ; for into the chamber there entered a little black slender figure, hung about with golden bells, with piercing eyes, diamond bright, and a pert, proud, consequential carriage. Need I say it was Fanfreluche ?

She darted at me, angered, curious, brimful of irritation, and readiness for insolence ; then dropped her nose to mine, and cocked her ears, and screamed, ' Mercy ! if it's not that little fool ! '

The salutation was not courtly nor complimentary ; yet it fell sweetly upon my ears. Is not the roughness, or the sarcasm, of a friend more welcome than the suave insincerity of conventionality-clothed foes ? It is so to us : not perhaps to you ; for humanity has learnt to love a daintily dressed false-

hood. What matter to you if garden snails, pulled off the cabbages, have made your soup, so long as you don’t know it and are cheated by a clever cook into murmuring, ‘ What a good *consommé* !’

Fanfreluche knew me, instantly ; and was glad to see me, with that warmth of heart which had always underlain her cynical assumptions. Quickly, as though we had never parted, we were talking fast in that tongue of ours, which you understand as little as you—deaf in your own conceit—understand what the rooks talk to one another in the sweet still evening-time ; or know the meaning of the night-birds’ signals, as they move in the world of shadows ; or catch the word of warning with which the black cock, on his tussock of heather, tells his brethren of the rifle-gleam ; or comprehend the coqueteries of the prairie-fowl’s quaint ceremonious country-dances ; or know by what rule of command and subjection the great armies of porpoises move with such precision and wisdom ; or tell what amorous poetry the stock-dove murmurs to her mates through the sweet green summer silence ; or translate any other of the innumerable tongues that daily and nightly fill the woods and waters, the meadows and seas, with their meaning. A meaning to the full as

intelligible and as useful as that of your own speech ; only you are too vain to believe it, and too limited indeed in your intelligences to be able to do so much as perceive it.*

‘Where on earth have you been all these years?’ began Fanfreluche, showing the passage of the years herself no more than does your ‘frisky matron.’ ‘And you look as much of a baby as ever you did, you poor little atom of swansdown !’

This was insolent, for I was treble her size, but I was too content to meet her once more, to pause to vindicate my dignity ; and indeed she gave me no time to do so, nor any peace, until I had related to her all my vicissitudes from the period of my disappearance. For them she evinced some compassion, and more contempt : as I believe your friends are in the habit of doing when you tell them how your wife has gone wrong, your bank broken, your horse proved a non-stayer, your pigeon fallen outside the enclosure, or any other misfortune of your existence.

‘I am sorry you have ever been professional,’

* I hope a certain contemptuous tone of self-glorification, that runs throughout, will be forgiven to my friend Puck. It is perhaps pardonable when we reflect that his race always smell out a rogue, however he may be clothed ; and that we seldom or never detect one provided only he be, as the French say of their abricots, *très bien doré*.—ED.

she said disdainfully, when she had heard of the days of La Pipetta. ‘You haven’t lost caste. We don’t: a thoroughbred’s always a thoroughbred, if he come down to drawing a cart. But the stage never suits us. It suits *them*. Human beings are always acting off the boards; they may just as well do it on; a lie or two more or less, when they are about it, doesn’t matter much. But we—’

‘Tell me all about yourself. What have you done?’ I interrupted her, remembering of old her disposition to chatter epigram, or what she thought was such, with about as much reason as your ignorant diner will take a bit of mutton, smothered in sauce, to be an epigramme d’agneau.

‘Done!’ she echoed. ‘*I?* My dear, I should talk all night if I attempted to tell you. You’ve lived in a puppet-box, an auberge, and an attic. I’ve lived with one duchess, one marchioness, three anonymas, a rector’s wife, a horse-couper, an ambassadress, a tinker, and a manufacturer of truffles—india-rubber, and so true to life that nobody but a dog could have told the difference; people went into ecstasies over their flavour! Done? Why, it’s an eternity since I saw you! A bride whom I was bought for when you went off the scene—such

a pretty creature, and quite a love-match!—has had time to get into the “Court of Probate, &c.,” and out again, and is just going to marry her lover. By the way, I saw her throw her arms round her husband, and kiss him with her pretty innocent lips, the very night she ran off with the other one from old Lady Tynemouth’s “small and early:” Oh! those dear women!’

‘And what became of the husband?’

‘How out of fashion you are, thinking of *him*—that comes of living in puppet-boxes and garrets. Oh, he went mad, I believe: is mad now. A fine gallant-looking fellow, too; but I knew from the first he was a great fool: he always preferred sweet champagnes, and never could eat a raw oyster.’

‘But tell me all that has happened here?’ I urged, breathless and curious, as I gazed at the familiar faces, and the familiar things, and heard Beltran’s slow melodious contemptuous tones, and Denzil’s deep frank laughter. ‘Has he restored the theatre? And who is that lovely woman?’

‘That lovely woman you will know more about than I,—for you are going to live with her, I believe. He restored the theatre, at a ruinous cost, directly

after it was wrecked, partly because, out of kindness, he wouldn’t turn his employés adrift in mid-winter ; and partly out of pride, because he wouldn’t have the town say that the success of his stage depended on Laura Pearl, or Avice Dare as you used to call her—’

‘ And she is in Paris ? She is Cléopâtre ? ’ I demanded, scarce able still to disentangle past from present, dream from fact.

‘ She is Cléopâtre—just now—yes,’ assented Fanfreluche ; ‘ what she’ll be before she dies nobody on earth can say—a peeress, or a princess, I shouldn’t wonder. That woman understands the great rule of success, — “*frappez vite, et frappez fort,*” — and don’t care a hang where you strike. I was in Paris all last winter, and I thought she was having a very good time, as the Americans say : she spent her thousand francs a-day ; she had peaches before anybody else, she changed her dress four times in every twelve hours, she had the best horses in the Bois, the Court wore a robe Watteau she had revived, a new liqueur was christened after her, and tortoise-shell fans became the rage because she carried one. I don’t know what a woman wants besides all this to be in paradise ! ’

I shuddered : I thought of Carlos.

That history seemed too terrible to speak of to this gay satirist.

‘What are you thinking about ? You are not the livelier for your exile !’ cried Fanfreluche. ‘Ah, my dear, you should have lived as I’ve done ; with men who make up delicious truffles out of a little india-rubber, and women who make up lovely faces with dead hair and their paint-boxes. They are the comedy of life. You’ve been with people dreadfully in earnest, who ate dry bread, and wore their own hair, and looked sallow with sorrow, and did no end of fools’ things, and went through life as through a tragedy :—I know ! There can’t be a greater mistake. Everything is amusing, if you’ll only look at it in that light.’

‘Life has gone so well with you !’ I retorted.

‘Oh, well enough, my dear. And why ? I bite everybody’s legs if I’m unhappy, you should see how quick they get to make me comfortable ! The secret of being happy yourself lies in the capacity to be intensely disagreeable to other people—’

‘That sounds very unamiable—’

‘Unamiable ! what does that matter ? An amiable dog is a fool—every little cur in the streets

snarls in his path, and every scamp of a boy throws stones at him.’

‘But his own people love him?’

‘Oh yes, love him so dearly that they give him a sound kick in the ribs—knowing he won’t return it!’

I thought she had grown soured by growing older, female creatures will; or at least on our ear, a *mot*, that only sounds prettily piquante when the speakers are young, has a spiteful ring in its tone, we fancy, when they are young no longer. Indeed, these sharp trivialities annoyed me at this moment, when I was all agitation and excitement at my sudden return, and full of eagerness as to all that had happened in this little world during the dreary seasons that I had been absent from it.

‘We are just the same as we always were, my dear,’ she said, pettishly. ‘Bless you! in our world we never alter anything; our hearts may be broken, our honour be blasted, our peace gone for ever, the one friend we trusted dead, the one woman we cared for lost, we never change anything; we dine and drive, and smoke and saunter, and laugh and drink, and make love just the same.

Why not? Our one canon is—not to show that we're beat. *Beau joueur ne faut se plaindre.*'

'It must be hard to do that sometimes.'

'It is hard to the canaille; it is second nature to the gentleman,' retorted this determined aristocrat. 'If you want news, of course we have always plenty of that. No end of marriages, and divorces, and scandals, and turf-ruin, and cocotte-ruin, and all the rest of it; there are fresh stories every day, just as there's fresh butter for breakfast. But nothing makes much difference—nothing—unless perhaps it's the grouse disease.'

'The grouse disease!'

'Well, yes: there's nothing exactly to put in those birds' places; but men and women get supplied quite as fast as they get bowled over. "Durham's gone," they were saying last autumn everywhere; and he was "gone" for some four hundred thousand; nothing in the world left him except his bare title; for Royeldene wasn't entailed. Now, Sir D'Arcy Durham—you remember him?—was, take him all in all, the best-loved man in the country; witty, sweet-tempered, generous to madness, brilliant exceedingly, he was yet of happy enough nature to have scarcely an enemy, and to be adored nearly as

much by man as by woman. Well—who thinks of him now? He's ruined and has gone to Norway, or—no one knows where. "Durham would have handled these line hunters better than that d—d fool;" or "Durham wouldn't have squandered a fine lot of foxes like this duffer," they have said now and then when wrathful with some M. F. H. And that's all; except that two or three women have looked white, for a month or two, in spite of their rouge.'

'Do hold your tongue,' I entreated, 'or else tell me why I am here and what has happened to them all, and who is that beautiful fair woman.'

'As to why you are here I don't know. Simply, I believe, because Beltran wanted a dog of your sort, and bade some fanciers look out for one; in consequence of which you were sent him. No design, my dear; nothing but coincidence,—the one odd-tempered deity that rules the world. When those poor devils of novelists jumble a lot of impossible coincidences all pell-mell together without building-plan, or sequence, or any sort of sense, they are all wrong as to Art, clearly, but they are awfully true to Life. As to them—as I tell you, nothing makes much difference to them. They've dined, and

dressed, and shot, and hunted, and played whist, and made love, much the same as ever they did. They're always saying they're tired of the life, but I don't think they can be, for they never seem to try any other. Beltran's been to Africa and killed a lot of things; and a mare of Guilliadene's won the Oaks, spread-eagleing in splendid style all her field, though the very merest outsider; and Derry Denzil's published another book that the men swore by in the smoking-rooms, and the women cried over, and the critics called immoral, so that I suppose it was a great success with three such vouchers for it. *Du reste*—I don't think there's much to tell. There's been plenty of news, of course, but now-a-days, when nobody ever takes up a paper without seeing some friend or another divorced, bankrupt, breaking a bank, or writing a novel, no news seems to have much taste in it—your *bombe* is all water-ice.'

'But the theatre?' I persisted, out of patience.

'Oh, the theatre is doing wonders, they say, since this new miracle came into it. All the cellar-flip-flaps done away with, you know, my dear, we go in for nothing but high art, or at least as nearly high as is possible in an age that prefers high feeding.

'But who is *she*?'

‘I can’t say. Our stars are seldom lost Pleiades that can be named and placed : they are generally “*etoiles qui filent—qui filent—qui filent et disparaissent!*” You are going to live with her. You can’t want to ask me.’

‘And where do you live?’

‘With Beltran.’

I could not repress a sigh of envy and of sorrow : my pleasant place in those pleasant chambers ! Nothing looks so sweet to us as a lost home in which a stranger is installed. The flaming sword, betwixt the infuriate cherubim of the brazen gates, was more merciful by far to the Eden-banished sinners than would have been the sight of other human creatures sunned in the lost light of that fair forbidden kingdom.

‘You are fortunate,’ I said with a sharp pang.

‘I don’t know about that, my dear,’ she made answer. ‘I suppose I am. I have always made it a practice to pilfer anything that looks tempting, and bite everything weaker than myself that I meet with : I believe that is the sort of practice that makes men’s fortunes, so it ought to make ours. I wished to live with Beltran, so last season I just walked into his rooms and stopped there. They

couldn't get me to go out, do all they would ; so they ended by making themselves agreeable to my staying. If you want to get a place, try that way. I've seen so many public men keep in offices, that everybody wanted to turn them out of, only by that power of theirs of sticking tight, as a sea anemone sticks to its rock ! " A masterly inactivity " is never so masterly as when it glues you fast to a good berth, no matter whether you're fit or unfit for it. They understand that so well in all cabinets ! '

' You must know everything about him, then ? '

She turned her nose in the air.

' My dear ! There are four orders of creatures that always know everything—they are journalists, ladies'-maids, priests, and toy terriers. '

And therewith she left me in the half-lit recess where the grand piano stood, and trotted out into the full light, where she put herself into a pretty pose in order to get bonbons thrown to her.

Whilst she was gleefully catching the burnt almonds and crystallized cherries, and cracking them with a monkey-like unction, I sat in my corner, not knowing rightly yet whether I were awake or dreaming.

The very familiarity of the aspect of all around

me only increased the confusion of my ideas: there was nothing but what I had dreamily remembered, a score of times, in the visions which had visited me lying under a contadino's tent in the harvest-fields of the Campagna, or watching the pale moon glide above the metal roofs of Paris:—nothing except the picturesque head of this beautiful fair woman, the like of which I had never seen either in life or dreams. I sat still and gazed at them: ‘gazed beyond all at Beltran. Having so long beheld nothing but the passionate, black-browed, sun-bronzed faces of the Roman peasantry, and the lean, swart, keen, eager visage of the Parisian workmen,—save when I had seen the golden beauty and fervid youth of the painter Carlos,—these men, once so familiar to me, with their handsome colourless faces, their low serene voices, their tired laughter, their look of fatigue, their consummate tranquillity and indifference, seemed like the creatures of another world.

Could passion stir them? pain move them? want consume them? life be known to them through any other thing save its pleasures and satieties? Idly I wondered this, judging foolishly from the surface. I might have known that no passions burn fiercer, no romances wax stronger, no courage ever

flames higher, and no hearts perchance ache more wearily, than in these lives that look so passionless, so tranquil, so cynical, so selfish, and, as your world will have it, so culpable.

If you doubt what these men are whilst you see them live, go and see them die, as they have died again and again, at Steinkerk, at Edgehill, at Vittoria, at Hougoumont, at Inkermann. Jacques Bonhomme shrieked and struggled, and writhed and screamed, as they led him to the scaffold ; but, think you that Rohan cared nothing for the sweetness of life because the proud blood never paled before the axe, and the mute lips never once lost that smile of serenest disdain ?

I cannot tell why these disjointed thoughts drifted vaguely through my mind as I looked at Beltran, even in that moment of bewilderment and of restoration. Except, indeed, that in the faces of men like himself, as they lie at length on the heather, or pace their yacht-deck, or smoke their cigar on a battle-field, or murmur love-nonsense in an opera box, you can trace the old *race* so curiously. The old race with all its reckless daring, and its feudal insolence, and its courtly gentleness, and its imperious temper, and its loyal honour, and its simple

religion of ‘noblesse obligé,’ still alive under all the changes of manner and habit; the old race, which is still, whatever be its faults or follies, what a mob will cower before, and a soldier will follow to the death, and a people will look to in its hours of action or of need, and a woman will choose before any other type of manhood to be beside her in any time of menace or of peril.

From my dusky corner I watched, and wondered, and listened, and puzzled my brain: the room was the same, the men were the same, Fanfreluche was the same, the very silver box that held the cigarettes was the same, and yet—there was a great difference. The voices seemed much gentler; the laughter seemed much quieter; the wines were but little touched; the conversation, as I caught snatches of it, seemed artistic, pleasant, sometimes playful, sometimes earnest, but at all times the conversation of men, talking at their ease indeed, but still troubling themselves to talk ably, and conscious of the presence of a woman who could discern such ability. Above all, their speech was fit for a delicate ear even in their sharpest witticisms, and there was not a flavour of that cynical indecency which had been so general to the same speakers

here in the days of Avice Dare.

What had wrought the difference I wondered? Certainly she who now sat there with that fair, childlike, and yet queenlike head, and those dreaming luminous, grave, eyes, and that voice which made the simplest words of common speech sound music, and that rich old-world velvet dress without a single jewel or ornament of any sort, was very different to the form that I had used to see there; blazing in sapphires or in rubies, and full of the supreme vanity of its own wanton, deep-hued, gorgeous, physical perfections displayed to the eyes of others, as the peacock spreads its plumage to the sun.

Men are very much in society as women will them to be. Let a woman's society be composed of men gently-born and bred, and if she find them either coarse or stupid, make answer to her;—‘You must have been coarse or stupid yourself.’

And if she demur to the *tu quoque* as to a base and illogical form of argument, which we will grant that it usually is, remind her that the cream of a pasturage may be pure and rich, but if it pass into the hands of a clumsy farm serving-maid, then shall the cheese made thereof be neither Roquefort nor

Stilton, but rough and flavourless and uneatable, ‘like a Banbury cheese, nothing but paring.’* Now, the influence of a woman’s intelligence on the male intellects about her is as the churn to the cream : it can either enrich and utilize it, or impoverish and waste it. It is not too much to say that it almost invariably, in the present decadence of the salon and parrot-jabbering of the suffrage, has the latter effect alone.

‘ Pray tell me who this exquisite creature is ? ’ I begged of Fanfreluche, who returned to me when she had eaten at her own sweet will of bonbons till she was tired of them.

‘ You’ll hear enough of her, my dear,’ she retorted, ‘ the town talks of her, and crowds this place to see her. She does act well, that I grant ; but if she only knew it, she don’t want her genius a bit ; she might act like a stick ; they’d come just the same,—once set going.’

‘ But to set them going requires the genius ? ’

‘ Gracious, no ! ’ returned my ancient monitress, with unutterable contempt. ‘ If you can just get it well bruited about that a woman’s very pretty, or very immoral, or has tried to poison some people,

* Jack Drum’s Entertainment, 1601.—ED.

or has got fabulously little feet, or is going to play a shockingly scandalous character, any of these things will draw a great deal better than any amount of talent. What made this one's fame? Not her capabilities, though they are great; but just this one line in the *Midas*—"She is the loveliest woman we have ever seen upon this or upon any other stage, and her attire is simply—perfection." The men went to see the face, the women to see the dress: her fortune was made. *Voilà!*

'She is a great actress, then?'

'She is a charming actress. I don't think we can have a great one. We are not barbaric enough; and we are too incredulous. You want a good deal of barbarism and a good deal of faith in an age, to get a really great stage out of it. To us, after our late dinners and with our pleasant indolent spleen, Lady Macbeth looks ridiculous, and Othello seems very bad form. We are as wicked as ever other ages were, as passionate and as vile and as guilty as ever they were; but it is all in a very different fashion: and the fashion is one which it is much easier for the satirist to deal with pungently than it is for the dramatist to render artistically. Chignons, and co-respondents, plunging and

paniers, Americanism and Cocotteism, are so much better suited to a Sheridan or Beaumarchais, than to a Shakespeare or a Sophocles. The odd thing is that, in the dearth of the poetic drama, not one satirical comedy has as yet held up the mirror to all that tempts such a mirror so strongly. The odd thing is that, with such a field for them, we have no Sheridan, and no Beaumarchais.’

‘I did not ask for a dissertation on the drama,’ I interrupted her impatiently. ‘I want to know about this woman?’

‘I’ll tell you all I know, my dear,’ said Fanfre-luche, seating herself comfortably. ‘You remember the wreck of the theatre, of course?—Well, he restored it, as fresh and pretty and dainty as any enamelled bon bonnière. It is nicer than ever it was, with statuettes in its corridors, and little boudoirs behind its choicest boxes, and leaves and flowers everywhere. It cost enormously; but he did it chiefly out of pride, no doubt, that none might say the house had depended on Laura Pearl. Many persons wanted it: when a thing or a woman is known to be certain ruin it is always bid for so eagerly! But Beltran would not part with it. “I shall chance it till the lease is ended,” he always

answered; and the time came when I thought I knew why he had so answered.

‘The performance was much the same for a time: Maude Delamere and melo-dramas first; burlesque and ballet afterwards. Money was lost every night. I don’t know why; I suppose old Wynch did. The losses were so profitable to him that he retired, bought a small place in Surrey, and lives at ease. Last autumn twelvemonth I belonged to Mrs Riversleigh—pretty; notorious; husband vaguely “in the city;” good for water-parties, fish-dinners, drag seats; and doesn’t resent being cut if you meet her in the Park when you’re driving with your wife or your mother: you know the style I mean? Royston Wressyl was her chief friend at that time: a Major of Lancers in the old Sixteenth. She was in town because the Sixteenth were at Hounslow. One night Wressyl and she went to the Coronet with a few others; they were to sup at the Leviathan afterwards; and to take me with them for a wager, which they did. Wressyl carried me hidden in a big lorgnon case; but he needn’t have troubled himself, they knew me there.

“What do they play to-night, Royston?” she asked as we drove.

“ “I’m not sure,” he answered her, “but I’m awfully afraid it’s some old duffer’s dry-as-dust play. They were saying something to-day, though, in the Rag, about a new actress being announced.”

‘She didn’t ask any more. She only went to a theatre to show her diamonds, and have a pleasant supper somewhere with lots of champagne-cup. They neither of them knew Beltran personally, and had heard nothing.

‘At the entrance we met Guilliadene, who was intimate with them.

“ “What’s up, Ned ? ” Wressyl asked him.

“ “*Much ado about nothing*,” said the Earl. “And a new actress as Beatrice. Never played publicly in her life, they say. What a part to start with ! ”

“ “Awfully plucky,” said my Lancer. “ Safe to make a mull of it, I suppose ? Who is she ? ”

“ “I don’t know much about her,” replied Guilliadene. “ Merest novice, I think. Beltran’s always picking up stars that turn out to be sticks, like the rockets at Cremorne.”

And he went to his stall, and we to our box.

‘The play had begun. This woman was on ; you see what her beauty is, and she was costumed

superbly ; her hair was cut square on the forehead and waved loose behind, an anachronism, doubtless, but the very poetry of Coiffure. Her audience, which seemed an ordinary one, was apathetic and even hostile. It was the most piteous thing I ever saw. Her tones were almost inaudible ; her colour kept coming and going ; her agitation was very great ; and she looked so young, such a child with it all, you would have thought that the public must have been touched. But it was not. It hissed a little ; it yawned a great deal ; and Mrs Riversleigh and one or two women laughed loudly behind their fans. I think she heard the laughter, for I saw her shiver. Ah ! it must be a terrible thing, that first sound of your own voice in the vastness and stillness ; that first sight of the unknown crowd of satirical, indifferent, unpitying faces !

‘ The impersonation all through the first act was utterly tame and meaningless. If it had not been for her beauty, I think the house would have howled. As the curtain fell and Wressyl left the box for a moment, I managed to slip out and through the passages, till I got “ behind,” where there were only Beltran, Denzil, Dudley Moore, and Steinforth, the great author, you know. As the girl had

come off the stage she had rushed away to her room before they could stay her. Beltran looked grave, and more anxious than I had seen him do one race-day when a beaten horse had cost him half an estate.

“One can’t say much for your new wonder!’ they were muttering to him.

“No,” he answered, very quietly. “But I believe she will do well in time. You have not seen her act in private—I have.”

“I don’t doubt her charms for any private performance,” said Dudley Moore, drily; “but we have really tried to float as great geniuses so many pretty women, with only their prettiness to recommend them, that I am getting rather doubtful of the utility of the process—it can’t claim novelty, and I fear it can’t claim propriety.”

Beltran did not show either annoyance or impatience. “Don’t judge her just yet,” was all he said, very quietly still.

When the actress was called again, and left her room, her face was quite white and her eyes all black and humid with a bewildered sort of terror.

“I have acted so ill! I feel so frightened!” she murmured breathlessly to Beltran, not seeming

to see that any others beside himself were present. He stooped to her very kindly and gently.

““ You have not done great things at present, certainly. But you can—and you will. Try and forget that any one is listening ; and only remember how I want you to succeed.”

‘ The last words were murmured so low that only she and I heard them. She drew a deep breath, the colour flushed her face, a sort of inspiration seemed to seize her, and she went. From that moment her acting was entirely changed. Her voice rang clear, and full of exquisite cadences ; her beauty grew radiant with pride and strength. She seemed to feel her own force, and to be filled with the powers of art. All the beautiful insolences, all the changeful colours, all the splendid audacities, of genius shone out in her ; and triumphed. Her audience, indifferent and even alienated before, were first startled and then captivated. They realized that this creature to whom they had been at best contemptuously indulgent, as to a lovely child whose failure they pitied, but whose weakness wearied them, was in truth their mistress, through the dominion of great gifts ; and could force them to rejoice with her, to weep with her, to laugh, and to suffer, and to love

with her, at her will and at her fancy. They woke from their apathy into a sort of fury of admiration ; and the house rang with raptures of applause.

“ And there’s not an ounce of that *bought*,” murmured Beltran. “ It’s genuine, whatever it’s worth.”

“ We were right to suspend judgment,” said Dudley Moore, taking snuff. “ I have never seen anything more poetic and more sincere, more delicate and more vivid,”—and what he said the town was certain to say after him on the morrow.

‘ Her triumph was very great ; only the greater it seemed because heralded by failure. The house was convulsed with excitement ; they called for her again and again ; the women laughed no longer, and the roof rang with a tumult of applause.

‘ When she came off the stage, for the last time after the recall, her face was deeply flushed ; her eyes gleamed like two stars ; her whole frame trembled ; she had the look of a creature in delirium. She stretched out her hands to Beltran with a little, breathless, hysterical sob, “ Have I done well,—at last ? ” He took them in his own and bent tenderly to her. “ Better than the best : I cannot say how I thank you.”

‘At that moment one of the officials of the theatre, whom Wressyl had sent to seek me, bore me away, and back to Mrs Riversleigh’s box, where that lady was in wrath and dudgeon because the Lancer, in an excitement of admiration at the new Beatrice, had, unauthorized, flung her bouquet of red-and-white camellias upon the stage. We did not stay for the burlesque that evening, as the delicate little suppers at the Leviathan are too perfect to be kept waiting; and I saw no more of the actress. But from that night her fame was made, and her name heard upon the lips of London.’

‘And what is she to Beltran?’ I asked, as she closed her narration.

Fanfreluche grinned: her worst grin.

‘Ah, my dear! That’s what the town’s been asking ever since, and never has got an answer yet. But look, they are going. Good-bye till to-morrow; I’m very glad to see you here again.’

When the little gathering broke up, the actress drew about her those black laces and sealskins lined with rose, which I had noticed on the couch, and stooping for me, raised me so that I could lie curled upon the soft sea-furs.

An elderly woman, who was in waiting in

the ante-room, offered to take me, but she refused the offer, as she had declined those of the men about her, and carried me herself through the various passages to the entrance of the theatre, where a carriage stood. They accompanied her, talking the while with her, as men and women do who have the custom of daily association and familiar friendship ; and bade her good-night at the door of her brougham, which rolled rapidly away. She and her maid drove on in silence, whither, of course, I could not tell. When the carriage paused, we passed through a fragrant garden, whose leafless boughs were very dark and still in the dim moonlight, and thence through a very small square hall, and up a staircase in which the lights were burning low ; it was too dark to see much, but all seemed pretty and luxurious about me ; and as she carried me into a room on the right, I perceived that it was the chamber of one to whom both art and gold had ministered.

It was of small size, and of much simplicity ; but it had an exceeding elegance and harmony in all its arrangements. She laid me down upon her seal-skins, then sank into a chair before the hearth on which a fire was brightly burning. Her attendant

asked her, with a solicitude that seemed quite genuine, if she were not very tired?

‘I am often tired; that is no matter,’ she answered, with a smile, which though fatigued was very sweet and glad. ‘Take these things off me, please, and bring me some tea.’

The maid obeyed, wrapping round her some cashmeres, and letting loose all the fair masses of her hair; then brought her the tea in a miniature old-fashioned service of egg-shell china, and left her alone by her desire. She called me from my resting-place and raised me on her lap; stroking me and even laying her lips on my forehead.

‘I shall love you for his sake. Had it not been for you I might never have known him,’ she murmured. ‘But still you can never be to me what my dear old friend was!’

And—looking at her thus, with the fire-glow upon her, I knew her, despite all the magic changes wrought by time, and gold, and fame. I knew her to be—Gladys Gerant.



CHAPTER V.

A STORY OF THE SEA.



THINK Fanfreluche spoke with reason.

Coincidence is a god that greatly influences mortal affairs. He is not a cross-tempered

deity, either, always; and when you beat your poor fetish for what seems to you an untoward accident, you may do wrong; he may have benefitted you far more than you wot.

Not very long ago, a man and a woman loving each other well, were parted by misunderstanding,—one of those sad, dreary, proud phantasies, that so often arise between you human creatures and your happiness. Neither would stoop to explain, they were divided during two long years: for it is strange

how people living in the same society may yet grow utter strangers to each other ; how passing one another daily in the park, how brushing against one another in the opera corridors, how hearing one another's names uttered by many lips, how beholding one another's faces in the crowded rooms of great assemblies, or of private views, they may yet remain as utterly divided from one another, as though oceans rolled between them.

Well, the time came when the woman, haughty, lovely, and brilliant, was, through a series of family calamities, doomed to an exile that galled her bitterly, in a far-away lonely German forest-land.

Awhile later, the man, by what he deemed the bitterest injustice and injury to him in his service, which was diplomacy, was consigned as Envoy to a miserable petty state, in which his talents rusted, and his name was unheard, and his weeks and months passed by in an unutterable weariness and inaction.

One summer day, in a deep old Teutonic wood, where no footfall but a forester's or charcoal-burner's ever fell, and the millions of pines were wrapped in twilight even at noon, these two, each unwitting of the other's presence in the hated land of banish-

ment, met face to face, suddenly, in that stillness and that solitude. And in that moment their hearts went out to one another, and the veil fell from their eyes, and the old love reigned alone !

Pride had been strong in the press of the world ; but here, chance touched and startled them, and surprised from both their secret : and thus from the thorns of harsh accident, there blossomed for them sweet flowers of passion and of peace.

(‘And, my dear, there was something beside chance, for there was ennui,’ said that matter-of-fact iconoclast, Fanfreluche, when she heard of them. ‘He must have been awfully bored, you know, and so was much readier to make it up with her, than he had been when decently well amused in London. It’s an immense pull for a woman, you know, to get at a man when he is thoroughly bored. He’s so much more glad of her then.’ But this was only the comment of a shallow cynic ; and the story truly ran as I have told it.)

Coincidence now had tossed me back amongst life, and luxury, and friends ; and I was glad and grateful : not querulous as you too often are when what you have long coveted comes to you.

When the morning broke, I found myself in a

small elegant house, as warm as an eider-bird's nest, and as pretty as an enamelled snuff-box; such a house as may be seen by the score along the Thames or the Seine; shut in amidst miniature gardens, that doubtless were one mass of foliage and flowers in summer, to judge by the maze of greenery that was now snow-powdered and silver-frosted.

It was so small and so pretty that it was like a toy; but in common with those little jewelled teapots, and stags, and other trifles, that hang to your watch-chain, it was only such a toy as gold could purchase.

Once more there were the softness, and the smoothness, and all the nameless pleasantnesses of life when money rounds its angles, about me. Once more I slumbered on silken cushions; and was fed on dainty forms of nourishment; and was pranked up* with bright ribbons upon my throat. And it was sweet to me to be thus soothed, and fed,

* Puck seems fond now and then of retaining some of the archaisms of the language which he learned no doubt in the north country, where many of the strong picturesque words of Shakespeare, and *Piers Plowman*, are still in daily use. Why should such words be lost? Talkers may perhaps shrink from the charge of eccentricity incurred by using them; but writers surely need not care for it.—ED.

and caressed, and decked, and dighted, as in my early days of fashion and of favouritism, for such outward symbols show that the world goes well with us, and that we are of value and of ornament in it. For it is all very well to call these things fribbles and frivolities; they may be so; but they are a great portion of the pleasure and the ease of existence at any rate. I know a man who was always inveighing against them (he was rich, and possessed them, mind you), he was deeply bitten with many stern philosophies of equality, and was wont to sigh for a time, when bread and broth in even portions to all should vouch for the perfect isonomy of the State.

But whilst he thus theorized, I never knew any one more particular than he as to the age and delicacy of his wines; and in the autumn when he was belated, and perforce detained by a broken ankle, in a rough and remote Highland inn, his rage at the peat, and the fleas, and the oaten cake, and the rusty bacon, and the wretched rooms, was so dire that none durst scarce approach him.

‘Equality would be very charming, dear, but still—I don’t think you’d *do* for it,’ said his pretty provoking wife, as he swore right and left at the Gaels.

This house in which I found myself was, as I say, exquisite ; on that first morning breakfast was served in the daintiest fashion, in a bewitching little warm violet-hued room, in which you caught here and there the glint of dead gold ; and the mistress of it all (in whom beyond a question I saw the child whom I had once seen so sad and desolate in the streets striving to sell her dying harebells) was fully in keeping with such a chamber, as she sat in a low chair, beside the fire, reading her letters and papers of the early day, whilst her maid served her with chocolate and delicate bread, and purple hothouse grapes.

It was all perfectly charming : the fire, the chamber, the colour everywhere, the silence only broken by the singing of a bullfinch in the window ; this beautiful woman ; the very cream and biscuits that they brought me for my food ; all were charming beyond measure on that winter morning, so cold without, so bright within ; so vivid in contrast with those cheerless dawns which had broken so gray and biting in the attic of the house in Paris. And yet,—my blood for a moment ran as cold as though I were hungry and homeless in the falling snow.

How could a friendless, penniless, helpless young creature, such as had been Gladys Gerant, have come to attain such comfort and such elegance as were present here, except through the ways of evil ! For I knew that such transmutations can only be wrought by casting into the crucible of fate the pearl of honour that, perishing, leaves in its stead the coveted philosopher's stone, which is gold.

And yet I felt ashamed of my own thought, as I looked at her delicate proud face, that from its childish innocence and sadness had changed into this exceeding beauty ; altering so greatly, and yet retaining the same grave lustrous meditation in the eyes, the same dreaming sweetness on the mouth.

Whatever her life might be now, it was certain that she was a creature of most unusual loveliness, and grace, and genius ; and no less certain that she was happy—happy, with more than the mere feverish joys of fame. And to me, remembering her in her great misery and her desolate youth, it seemed that she could not be so entirely content as this, unless she had in some way killed her conscience.

For in my brief life I had seen that all which was noble and loyal, and of purity and honour, was most usually doomed to a long and weary thole ; capable

indeed of joy in its highest, but seldom if ever knowing it.

She sat beside the hearth, reading : her room seemed filled with papers and new books ; and I sat gazing at her wondering, wondering, where was Bronze ? who had made the wandering child into this exquisite empress ? was the poor dead poet forgotten ? above all, what was she herself to Beltran ?

I shuddered as I thought : that pure child whom I had seen kneeling in the moonlight, with the prayer for her lost brother on her lips, could never have learned the wicked ways, and taken the wicked wage, of Avice Dare ?

And yet, otherwise, how came she hither in this affluence and ease ?

The morning passed very quietly ; I was tired and slept a good deal, overcome with fatigue and excitement. I was awakened by the striking of the clock, and the appearance of a light luncheon. She scarcely touched it, and went afterwards into her drawing-room, carrying me with her : the room was as perfect as all the rest of the house, and was quite full of the bloom and odour of flowers, although the time of year was still winter.

She moved about a little, touching her flowers

pausing beside a picture, reërranging some china in the pretty way women have, then seated herself once more amidst the books.

Between two and three o'clock there were the grating of wheels in the carriage drive without, the sound of a man's step, the tinkle of little bells, and there entered Beltran, followed whether he would or no by Fanfreluche.

He cast down a loose coat of sables, came to the hearth, and seated himself in a low lounging chair with the manner of one accustomed to frequent the place daily.

By the quick turn of her head, by the brilliance in her eyes, by her smile as she saw him, it was easy to tell how welcome his advent was. No formal greeting passed between them; they began to converse as though they had been together the last hour: people only do this betwixt whom there is an entire accord.

‘Well, my dear, how do you find yourself?’ asked Fanfreluche with a grin.

I said that I found myself very well.

‘I dare say you do: it's a pretty place,’ she said drily. ‘On the whole Platonics don't seem such economical things as one thought they were—’

‘What do you mean?’

‘Never ask a person that. If his epigram or his argument be pointless or involved, you shouldn’t show him that you think so, by asking him what he means. I told you I’d see you to-day : we come here most days when we’re not hunting or shooting.’

‘You don’t hunt?’

‘No. A terrier isn’t such a fool. *We* nip our prey in the necks in a second; we don’t run it across half a county, and lose it in a drain after all. And to see what the hunting is now too! Knocking the horses all to pieces over cramped ground for sake of a fast twenty minutes! This is a pretty little house, isn’t it? The rent’s three hundred a year, furnished just as it stands; only the china, and pictures, and bronzes, and things are all hers, —or his.’

‘But how rich—’

‘Well, he pays her at the rate of fifty guineas a week, or rather has it paid to her, for she don’t know exactly that it’s his. Oh she’s worth it, no doubt. She’d get it at any theatre, now. Gladys Gerant? Oh yes, she is Gladys Gerant; acts in the name too. People think it a fancy name because it’s pretty. You see we have so many Polly Smiths and Betty

Browns who are Amandevilles, and Fitzosbornes upon the stage, that we think no woman can have a good graceful name really hers, unless she be in the Libro d'Oro, and has £5000 a year of her own. I told you he'd keep his promise, didn't I, when we were at Ascot?'

'But how has he kept it?' I murmured; it was well indeed with her, so far as success, affluence, ease, beauty, talent went, but otherwise?—

'I don't think that's any business of yours, my dear,' snapped Fanfreluche. 'I can't tell you anything. I knew nothing about her till that night she came out as *Beatrice*, and then, of course, I recognized the name, and remembered the story you'd told me.'

'But Bronze?'

'I know nothing about Bronze either. I was abroad, in different places, almost all last year, with my ambassadress, and my *prima donna*, and my truffle-maker. But there's a little low beast here, who can tell you, I dare say. He's called Patch, and lives in the kitchen by choice.'

'A cur?'

'Well—yes. A cur. Not that I like that word. They have snobs and cads, but we have no curs,—

not in the sense of disparagement that they use the word to imply. Even the Lurcher, the lowest type amongst us, is immeasurably superior to their Rough. With a poached hare in his mouth, he has a brisk, innocent, pleased air, and a conscience well at ease. He has no idea of dishonesty, and has only done his duty as his master taught it him. He is loyal, as far as his light goes ; he has served the power he reveres ; he has obeyed the lawgiver of his humble life, in ignorance, indeed, but in fealty and faith. When can they say as much ? No—we have no curs in the sense that they have cads ; for we have none in our race who strain to seem what they are not ; who are made hideous by vulgarity, made grotesque by assumption, or made infamous by lying. The lowest, ugliest, most hungry, most honest mongrel is always natural and always faithful. It is impossible, therefore, for a dog to be a snob.'

'Does she suffer still for her brother, or still remember him ?' I asked, not attending to her didactic digression.

'I can't tell you, I am sure,' she said, with a sniff of scorn. 'I never think much of their feelings at any time. They are all words. Creatures

that take out their grief in crape and mortuary tablets can't feel very much.'

'There are many lamentations, from Lycidas to Lesbia, which prove that whether for a hero or a sparrow ;—' I began timidly to suggest.

'That's only a common-place,' snapped my lady. 'They chatter and scribble ; they don't feel. They write stanzas of "gush" on Maternity ; and tear the little bleating calf from its mother to bleed to death in a long slow agony. They maunder twaddle about Infancy over some ugly red lump of human flesh, in whose creation their vanity happens to be involved ; and then go out and send the spring-tide lamb to the slaughter, and shoot the parent birds as they fly to the nest where their fledglings are screaming in hunger. Pooh ! Did you never find out the value of their words ? Some one of them has said that speech was given them to conceal their thoughts. It is true that they use it for that end ; but it was given them for this reason. At the time of the creation, when all except man had been made, the Angel of Life, who had been bidden to summon the world out of chaos, moving over the fresh and yet innocent earth, thought to himself, "I have created so much that is doomed to

suffer for ever, and for ever be mute ; I will now create an animal that shall be compensated for all suffering by listening to the sound of its own voluble chatter.” Whereon the Angel called Man into being, and cut the *frænum* of his tongue ; which has clacked incessantly ever since, all through the silence of the centuries.’

‘ Where is that legend ? ’

‘ In our traditions, which differ as much from the human ones as the human ones do from each other : *on ne pourrait plus !* ’

‘ It is a great pity we were denied the power of the art of writing.’

‘ Do you think so ? We should never have kept our honesty if we had learnt it. Don’t you know what that poor ruined Sir Robert said when he was dying ? “ If I had never known how to write my name upon paper, I should have been a good man, and a rich one now.” My dear, if we had known how to write, we should have taken to “ bills at 60 days, &c.,” and a hound’s kennel would soon have been no better than a club-room, with a sweepstakes card up on the mantel-piece ! ’

I yawned irritably. I was impatient of her talk. Your *pique assiette*, as Lever has aptly clept

the professional dinner-table jester, is very agreeable over the turtle soup and the trout à la Chambord; but as a continual companion he may be almost as tiresome as the bore of whom he relieves your dinner.

I prayed her to be quiet a little, and turned my attention to Beltran.

He was reading through several letters that Gladys had given him.

He looked at home there, stretched on the low long chair beside the fire, with that exquisite woman's face opposite him. He was not in the least altered; only I thought that his mouth had not quite so sarcastic a curl as of yore, and that his eyes had a very gentle and almost sad look in them that was new to their languor and coldness.

'You need not answer those at all,' he said, laying three of the letters aside. 'To these two dinner invitations send a brief refusal. To this manager, answer him that you have no intention to enter into any other engagements. For these fellows who want to send you MS. plays, silence will show them that we don't want their wares.'

'I would rather let them send their plays, and look at them,' she said pleadingly, as though she

were not much used to place her wish in opposition to his.

‘Why? They are certain to be trash.’

‘Most likely. Only—you know, some one among these authors may be a poor boy, breaking his heart over his writings as *he* did. They are all unknown names, and it will not be much trouble to look through them; and there may be some touch of talent, some glow of genius, in one or other of them, that will die out altogether if treated always with silence.’

He smiled.

‘Well, let them come if you like, though I fear they will hardly be worth the paper they are written on; and their verse will be emphatically “blank” as regards wit, grammar, meaning, or measure. As for these other two letters—have you read them?’

‘No. They seemed—flattery and folly. You told me once it was best not to read letters that commenced in that strain, and so I never go further than the beginning—now.’

He looked content, but not surprised.

‘I think you are right,’ he said simply. ‘Just read the signatures, however, and send them back

whence they came—without any comment. They *will* write these things to you—there is no help for it.'

'I suppose they admire me?' said Gladys thoughtfully, 'or they think it is the fashion to say so.'

He laughed; his old, curt, contemptuous laugh.

'Of course they admire you. There is no doubt about that. What a child you are still! Is there anything else?'

'Only this note from Lord Dammerell. He sent it up quite early with a wonderful little coffer, that, you see, he says belonged to the great Catherine. It was a beautiful thing; malachite crusted with opals, and the lock and hinges of gold. I wrote him my thanks, and begged to return it. His messenger took it away.'

She spoke quite indifferently, as of an every-day unconsidered trifle; but his face darkened as he took the note.

'Cis Dammerell!' he muttered; 'I introduced him to you myself.'

He said no more; but he tore the note into many little pieces, very slowly, and as if the action expressed anger that he did not put into words.

‘I remember that coffer—at Christie’s,’ he said, after a pause. ‘Dammerell will be slow to forgive you; he never had a rebuff before.’

‘You said last night you were quite happy?’ he asked her a few moments later abruptly. ‘Are you very sure that is true?’

She looked up with surprise; her wondering smiling eyes answering before her words.

‘True! Indeed it is true! I am so happy that I feel sometimes that I must be dreaming of this marvellous life. You see—it is still wonderful to me. All my childhood was so uneventful; we had so much sorrow in our pleasantest days; we had always the woe and care of such anxious needs; it was always so still there, and so simple, and so plain, just like one of those peaceful households that we read of in the old Puritan days,—that you, who have had the world with you always, cannot understand how the colour and movement and change and beauty of this existence you have given me, seem to me half miraculous still. In the old time, when Harold and I used to walk at evening under the orchard trees, and talk to one another of all our fancies and our dreams, we used to picture just such a future as you have made my present. I have only

one sorrow, only one,—that I should have it all, and he never have enjoyed one hour of it ! It seems so like avarice, selfishness, sin ! And to think he cannot even know—’

She paused, with a quiver in the rich eloquent sweetness of her voice, which told me that her brother was unforgotten.

‘ You ask me that question often now,’ she said, after a little while. ‘ Why do you doubt,—how can you doubt, that I am happy ? Think how much I have, how much I enjoy ; and what a desolate, friendless, hopeless child I was when I knew you first.’

Beltran flung the torn fragments of the note into the fire.

‘ I hardly know why I asked you. Only—I cannot do exactly as I would for you. You should not have such letters as these if I could prevent it ; but it is difficult, without doing you more harm than good.’

‘ They do not hurt me ; and they go—there,’ she answered him with a pretty half-haughty gesture of her hand toward the flames. ‘ I remember your warning me before you let me come to the stage, that in an actress’s career, annoyances,

humiliations, even insults were inevitable, because, her art being a public one, the world always deemed her life a public plaything too : and I told you what I thought then,—that though she might be annoyed she need neither be humiliated nor insulted, unless she chose to merit such abasement. I am an actress now,—and yet I think so still.’

‘ You are but a child now, and therefore you think so still.’

‘ But is it not so ? Humiliation is a guest that only comes to those who have made ready his resting-place and will give him a fair welcome. My father used to say to me, ‘ Child, when you grow to womanhood, whether you be rich or poor, gentle or simple, as the balance of your life may turn for or against you, remember always this one thing—that no one can disgrace you save yourself. Dishonour is like the Aaron’s Beard in the hedge-rows, it can only poison if it be plucked.’ They call the belladonna Aaron’s Beard in the country, you know ; and it is true that the cattle, simple as they are, are never harmed by it ; just because, though it is always in their path, they never stop and taste it. I think it may just be so with us ; with any sort of evil.’

She spoke with all the mingled poetry and

simplicity, all the tender thoughtful seriousness, that I had heard in her when she had told her story to the dancer Nellie. She was a lovely woman now; sitting there on her own hearth, clad in velvet and in lace, and conscious of celebrity and of victory in her career; but there was the same nature in her as in the days when she had gone, a famished, desolate, houseless child, to the little garret in Westminster; and the same accent was in her voice, the same accent of mingled pride and innocence, of strength and trustfulness.

Beltran listened, with a certain trouble in his gray, calm, weary eyes:—something in the words touched him, I think, for he got up and began to tease the bullfinch on its perch, and to criticize the hanging of some cabinet pictures.

‘You have put the Frère and the Tadema together,’ he said, going up to them. ‘For heaven’s sake don’t do that. Can’t you see how they harm one another? The stately elegance and ceremonial of the Roman patrician life, beside the little Bréton interior with two cottage children at play with some faggots of gorze!—look how they hurt each other, and make each other look, respectively, coldly artificial and insignificantly homely? Pictures, like

beauties, kill each other ; I am afraid no sort of skill in the hanging of galleries will alter the fact that the exhibition of many paintings amounts virtually to their extinction. We are getting too many, even into this little room.'

And they altered the place of the Frère and the Tadema, and talked of art ; to which I did not care to listen. The thoughts of art made my heart ache ; it brought to my memory the low, sunny, wooden chamber at the Silver Stag, with the white fruit-blossoms swaying at the casements, and the long shadows asleep upon the floor ; where the Faustine had taken her birth from that prophetic passion which is at once the inspiration and the destruction of human genius—a flame which consumes even while it illumines and conceives.

'Can you tell what she is to him, my dear ?' grinned Fanfreluche.

I admitted that I could not.

'Well—ask Patch. See if he can tell,' she responded. 'One isn't fond of intercourse with common dogs, but still when one can get anything out of them :—how civil my Lord A. and the Hon. B. and Sir C. C. can be to a low brute on the race-course, when they want to get at any straight

tip, or be on for a dark thing; I don't see why we need be more particular, and we have no class so low as their bookmakers, touters, and nobblers. A dog may be unpolished; he may gnaw a bone on the hearth-rug; he may go wild after a herring trail; he may carry his flag badly; he may demean himself to eat tripe; he may whine instead of bite when he's hurt; he may do many things which show him an under-bred one;—but he is never a Snob, or a Cad, or a Rough, as I said just now, and thank heaven he's never a Blackleg!

'Is it under-bred to whine when one is hurt?' I asked, conscious that, despite my aristocracy of descent, I sinned in this particular.

'Very, my dear,' averred Fanfreluche; 'when you are hit, *bite*,—bite deep and bite often. All success lies in the teeth; I told you that long ago.'

'But if we bite we are chained, or, still worse, we are killed?'

Fanfreluche grinned.

'There was once a dog, my dear, that was hit by three men, one after another, as they went by him where he lay in the sun; and in return he bit them—deep—and they let him alone then; and ever after sought to propitiate him. Well—the first he

bit in the arm, where there was a brand for deserting; and the second he bit in the throat, where there was a hideous mole; and the third he bit in the shoulder, where there was the mark of a secret camorra: now, not one of these three durst speak of the wounds in places they all wished to hide, and, when ever afterwards they passed the dog, they gave him fair words, and sweet bones, and a wide berth. It is the dogs, and the satirists, and the libellers, and the statesmen who know how to bite like that—in the weak part—that get let alone, and respected, and fed on the fat of the land.’

At that moment there entered the drawing-room Derry Denzil, and Florance Fane of the Guards: two or three other men followed in a little time, men of similar rank, who had come to town I suppose for the sake of their clubs, in the frost which made the ‘grass countries’ untenable at that moment. By the way, the other day, this autumn, I heard a woman whose dinners enjoy an excellent reputation, ask an ex-Coldstreamer, famous with Tailby and *the* Pytchley, when he would come to dine with her in the winter, which she was about to pass at her town quarters. ‘I’ll come *the first frost*,’ said he, and she felt no offence; she understood thoroughly

that herself and her menu played second to the 'little red rover,' and would be relegated if no frost came till the April days of budding chestnuts, and spring chickens, and new operas.

These men were all pleasant companions, as your thorough-bred man of the world almost always is, with his lazy sarcasms and his good-natured ironies, and his acquaintance with all the fresh mischief afloat, and his facile touches of art knowledge and political knowledge, and his racy history now and then of some field sport which he loves; in the telling of which all his poco-curantism fades away, and all his restless recklessness gleams for a moment on the surface of his half-amused, half-weary, discontent.

Such were these now; the fire burned brightly behind the broad banner screens; the light played prettily about the delicate colours of the room; the dainty five o'clock tea came, with sodas and seltzers; there were pleasant talk, airy nonsense, good-humoured disputes, melodious laughter.

It was with difficulty that I could bring myself to believe that I was not in one of those regal country-houses, where in the frosty weather the men had gathered at the tea hour in library or

morning room round some fair titled châtelaine.

‘She is very much in society it would seem?’ I murmured to Fanfreluche.

‘She is not in society at all, my dear,’ averred that dictatress. ‘Ask the Countess of Ben Nevis, who has had liaisons with every handsome *lion* out; or Lady Charles Whyte, who has her cottage in the Forest, to carry on her intrigues with the Guards; or Mrs Vereker, who goes to Paris with Hailes Haynes the tenor, and is none the worse for the escapade, because her own people never have dropped her; ask them if they’d know Gladys Gerant the actress,—their outraged virtue would be aghast!’

‘Does she know no women, then?’

‘None, my dear. He wouldn’t let her know the bad ones; and the good ones—or the pseudo-good—wouldn’t know her.’

‘How shameful!—how sad!’

‘Not a bit. As for the sadness, I don’t think myself that the British matron, whether heavy or frisky, is any such very great loss; and the British maiden in her day of slang and salmon-fishing, of “big coups” and “awful yawners,” certainly isn’t. As for the shamefulness, that’s nonsense. Every pleasure has its penalty. If a woman be celebrated,

the world always thinks she must be wicked. If she's wise, she laughs. It is the bitter that you must take with the sweet, as you get the sorrel flavour with the softness of the cream, in your soup à la Bonne Femme. But the cream would clog without it, and the combination is piquante.'

'Only to jaded palates,' I retorted, for I have often tasted the Bonne Femme, and detest it.

By the way, what exquisite irony lies in some of your kitchen nomenclature !

'Perhaps not,' assented Fanfreluche, forgetting for once to disagree. 'But in this case a very choice hand prepares her portion, and the cream of it is made so sweet that I don't think she's even found out yet that the sorrel-leaves lie at the bottom.'

And she left me to digest this dark saying as best I might, while she followed her master and the other men out of the drawing-room, and out of the house, as the little time-piece chimed the sixth hour.

At eight the young actress went to her art and her public. I strove to accompany her ; but was not permitted.

Left to myself, I wandered through the various rooms to dissipate my ennui, and also to search for Patch.

There was a little chamber, down a few steps, into which I peeped; it was cosy and warm, but simply furnished; there on the hearth I saw a small, broken-haired, mongrel dog, with a white spot over one eye, which had doubtless gained him his name.

He was a little, shabby, wiry, good-natured looking creature, and I made acquaintance with him,—a little arrogantly, I fear, for, with the first glimpse of the blue ribbon of revived aristocracy round my neck, I had consigned to oblivion the remembrance that I had ever danced for gain in the streets, and walked on my hind legs to beg for a copper coin.

‘Yes, I am Patch,’ he said. A little, straightforward, simple dog, evidently in nowise ashamed of his humble aspect and station.

Indeed, you never see any kind of base or petty pride amongst us; we will guard a knife-grinder’s barrow, or sit beside a tinker’s wayside work, with perfect loyalty and content, if grinder or tinker be our friend. Not so you! I have noticed in the best of you a certain failure in these respects.

In the old Oxford days Bertram Byng, your young rough north-country comrade at Balliol,

ground fine, with the wheel of his high intellect, the somewhat blunt edge of your own intelligence, in many an hour by Isis. And in that sad, dreary winter at Nice, when you had just lost the woman you loved, and could not find in *écarté* the whole end and aim of existence, as the apostles thereof said you should, that poor, witty, dubious, dark-historied Ina Raby amused you immeasurably, and bore with you patiently, and served you in many ways, and gave you many wrinkles for the *quatre à*, and *la belle*.

But when Bertram comes up now, rough and shabby, from his Devonian curacy, poor exceedingly, and with those old tendencies to roll Greek out so fearfully loud, and to heed not how many days' dust lie on his boots and his coat, only more intensely developed, you don't take him to the Athenæum or the Guards' Club for dinner; you dine him alone in your rooms, and tell your man, not at home. So, too, when Ina Raby comes to you, and men drop their eyes and say, 'What, *that* fellow!—thought he was dead years ago, you know, &c.'—you make excuses for not riding at noon; and back out of taking him to Hurlingham, though you offer warmly to take him to Sy-

denham ; and you continue to pass most of your time with your schooner where she lies in the Thames, and where Demi-monde and Bohemia can cruise with you—a hint which poor Ina, having been a gentleman in his day, quickly takes, and so pleads business in Paris, and goes back to the old weary life of whist and winter cities, of *écarté* and exile, of picquet and poverty, with a pang the more, may be, in his heart.

It is thus with you. Whereas we,—well, I will tell you a story.

Once at a great house in the west I saw a gathering on the young lord's coming of age. There were half the highest people in England there, and, a little while before the tenantry went to their banquet in the marquees, the boy peer and his guests were all out on the terraces and the lawns. With him was a very noble deer-hound whom he had owned for four years.

Suddenly the hound, Red Comyn, left his titled master and plunged head foremost through the patrician crowd, and threw himself, in wild raptures, on to a poor, miserable, tattered, travelling cobbler, who had dared to creep in through the open gates and the happy crowds, hoping for a broken crust. Red

Comyn pounced on him and caressed him and laid massive paws upon his shoulders, and gave him maddest welcome—this poor hungry man, in the midst of that aristocratic festival.

The cobbler could scarcely speak awhile, but when he got his breath his arms were round the hound and his eyes were wet with tears.

‘Please pardon him, my lord,’ he said, all in a quiver and a tremble. ‘He was mine once; from the time he was pupped, for a whole two year; and he loved me, poor soul, and he ha’n’t forgot. He don’t know no better, my lord—he’s only a dog.’

No: he didn’t know any better than to remember, and be faithful, and to recognize a friend, no matter in what woe or want. Ah! indeed we are far behind you!

For the credit of ‘the order,’ it may be added, that Red Comyn and the Cobbler have parted no more, but dwell together still upon that young lord’s lands.

‘I am Patch,’ said this little cross-bred fellow, ‘and I belong to Margett Llansaint.’

‘And who is Margett Llansaint?’

Patch with a glance showed me an old woman asleep by the fire.

‘ She is my mistress. She is Welsh.’

‘ And what does she do here ?’

‘ She is here by Lord Beltran’s wish. She was housekeeper to two generations of his family. They gave her an annuity and a little cottage on the Island.’

‘ It was where he took Gladys ?’

‘ I don’t know exactly what you mean. One summer Gladys Gerant came to us with a blue-eyed girl called Nellie, who did not remain very long. It was by Lord Beltran’s desire ; and he visited her twice or thrice himself, not often. She was in infinite woe because of the death of her brother. She did not gain health or strength at all till the spring came round.’

‘ And he kept her there at his cost ?’

‘ I cannot say. Margett was well paid for her, but I think it came from some monies that some book of her brother’s had brought. So, at least, I knew that our Lord told her. She was with us all the summer. Our cottage is so quiet and so fragrant, with the sea just seen through the great sweet-brier hedges, and the trees of dog-roses and myrtles. She used to dream all her days away by the sea. It seemed to bewitch her ; she would gaze at it for hours.’

‘Did he come often?’

‘No, very seldom. But I think she measured time by his coming only. With the winter we moved near London, to a little quiet place in Esher. I believe still by his direction. Here she had teachers and masters of divers kinds. And she studied hard, and long into the nights. Her eyes grew brilliant; her loveliness increased; her whole soul seemed filled with some great ambition. Then Lord Beltran came oftener, and at the close of the time brought two or three others with him, and I heard them talk of some eminence to which she would rise. One night in the late autumn she went away for several hours, and I suppose it was to this theatre, for ever since I have heard that she had become a great actress; I am not sure what that is, I do not understand much that they say. With the turn of the year we came to this pretty house; we have been here twelve months. I believe Lord Beltran desires Margett to be with her; but for me—I shall be very glad to go back to the Cottage.’

‘And what is he to Gladys?’

Patch looked at me in honest surprise.

‘What do you mean? I don’t know indeed.’

Her friend of course, for he is very good to her.'

I felt abashed at my own thoughts. But this is the worst of seeing the world, that you see so much evil that you suspect it everywhere.

'You cannot tell me any more, then?' I asked.

'Anything more? I don't know what you mean. I do not like exactly what I do see. This Gladys was a woe-begone, white-faced child when she came down to the Island; and she used to sit staring at the sea, as I say, with her great melancholy eyes; and she was only a poor yeoman's daughter; I have heard her tell Margett so, again and again; and now she is made a great lady of, though she is no one's wife; and she has all this grandeur about her, and she is caressed, and flattered, and decked with velvet and silks and laces. I do not like it—though I grant, when she was in the Island, she was always prettily willing to serve Margett with tending the garden, or the fowls, or anything that chanced; and now, though she is cockered up like this, she is always gentle-spoken and kindly of thought—'

'But why do you not like it?' I urged.

'It seems so absurd, and—I am not quite sure what an actress is, but I think it is something wicked—'

‘ Oh no—not always ; and she is a genius, they say.’

‘ A genius ? You must mistake. I have always heard that a genius is something that they beat to death first with sticks and stones, and set up on a great rock to worship afterwards. Now they make her very happy whilst she is alive. She cannot possibly be a genius.’

‘ You are sure she is happy ? ’

‘ She would be crazed indeed if she were not,’ said Patch with a little indignation. ‘ A girl like that, who came starved and half-dying, to be set up here like a queen, with lords and gentlemen around her—of course she is happy, though I know she grieves at times still for her lost people and Bronze.’

‘ Ah, Bronze, dear Bronze ! ’ I cried. ‘ Where is he ? ’

‘ Bronze is dead.’

Although I had felt so certain of the answer I should receive, that, coward-like, I had shrunk from asking it, the certainty struck me with a sharp and sudden pang.

‘ Dead ! ’ I echoed, stupidly. ‘ Dead ! Of old age ?—of illness ? ’

‘Of neither. The sea killed him.’

I begged him to tell me all; and he told it, in a quaint, poetic, simple fashion which had a sound in it that brought to me the memory of old Trust.

‘The girl Gladys came to us in Midsummer, and Bronze came with her, and the dancer too,’ commenced the little sea-bred dog. ‘The dancer did not tarry long: she was a saucy feckless creature it was easy to see, with ribbons and roses and all manner of follies about her; but she was soft of voice and of foot, and she seemed quite shy, as one might say, with Gladys, and to have taken quite a strange sort of love for her. I call it strange, because I was told that they had never met until a day or so before they were thus sent to us. The little dancer was loth to leave Gladys, and she was bidden to stay whilst she pleased; but the silence about and the sight of the sea seemed to daunt her and fright her;—I cannot tell how. “If I stayed long enow here,” I heard her mutter one day, “it would kill me for the business. I should think, and think, and think till every bit of heart for my work would go out of me like; all the jigging, and the singing, and the punning, and the—the—the—rest of it, would seem such pitiful stuff, and so foolish and vile; and

where, I wonder, should me and granny be then ? ” I remember her words, though I only half-guessed what she meant. They let her do as she would, and she went away after a week. It was sorrowful to see how she clung to Gladys and sobbed,—and Gladys so still and hopeless and silent, like a frozen creature, as she had been, they said, since the news of the death of her brother. “ I hope and pray you’ll never reproach me, dear ! ” Nellie cried over and over again. “ I hope and pray you’ll never reproach me ! ” I do not think Gladys knew what she said : she seemed to hear and notice nothing in those days. As for me, I could not tell the meaning of the words. I suppose the dancing-girl must have done her some wrong ? ’

I said nothing: to me such fear, such misgiving, seemed intelligible enough. I knew that Nellie had sought for her a succour that the world would have said was certain to be such succour alone as the kite gives the wood-dove with talon and beak. I doubted not that her mind had misgiven her for the issue of her work many and many a time since the day that she had rejected the old Roman scarabæi.

‘ Well, she went from us,’ resumed the little quaint, bigoted narrator, ‘ and Margett Llansaint

was glad when she was gone. All Margett's reverence for her master could not make her see that it was fitting to have under her roof a girl that wore mock roses in her hat, and mock laces on her bodice, and mock gems on her fingers, and who showed herself in a boy's dress nightly to the public, by her own confession.

'Gladys was different, you know, with that noble old-world look about her ; and that great grief that made her so still and lifeless ; and that grave simple fashion of her speech which had a dignity in it too. And, besides, she was an innocent child, and had scarce been off the borders of her father's farmlands. So the dancer went her ways, but Gladys and Bronze abided with us. It was Margett's lord's will, as I say ; and she strove her best to make them happy. And despair is not natural to youth, you know ; through the long autumn and winter Gladys was ill, and very restless and very sad, and seemed to know no pleasure save in watching the sea in its wrath ; but when the spring came, and the white sails gleamed in the distance, and the almond-trees put forth their bloom, and the little blue gentian blossomed in the clefts of the rocks, and the fisher children came out to play on the sands, the young

life in her seemed to wake, and to take interest in the life around her. She was always beside the sea—morn, noon, and eve, and Bronze never left her side. The fisher-people all came to know her, and to care for her very much. The rudest amongst them grew to think it honour to take her out upon the waters, and would hang an old sail upon a spar to shield her from the sun, and deck their boat as gaily as they could with seaweeds and with spear-grass. Margett used to murmur to herself that it was a purposeless life for one who would have to find her own support in time to come; and once she plucked up heart of grace and dared to write so much—humbly—to Lord Beltran. And he wrote back only one line—“Let her please herself; and don't trouble me.” Was it not a heartless answer? I do not think he cared anything for her—in those days. He had placed her with us, and thought of her no more; as he would have thought no more of a spaniel placed with a keeper.

‘Well, through all the summer it was the same. She spent well-nigh all her time drifting on the waters, or reading and thinking beside the sea. Our home was a little quiet chine, with no harbour or landing-place of any kind; where there was only

a cluster of fishermen's cottages; and where no strange ships or strange people ever came. A yacht, indeed, would scud past now and then, but very seldom; for you know they go but little on the southern side. She was never disturbed or molested: and in the sea-air, and the southerly sun, and the salt-bitten winds she seemed to get beauty so suddenly; such a new vivid sea-born beauty, that gave such a glow to her hair, such depth to her eyes, such warmth to her lips: and I think she was happy—despite her sorrow and her loneliness—happy in her freedom, and in her youth, and in her dreams.

‘ And she did dream: I used to see that in her eyes when she would sit at night by the lattice of her little room where the moonlight would stream, bright as any lamp, upon the pages of her book; and through the open casement, across the brier-rose hedge, and through the boughs of the almonds, she would see the great silvered width of the sea, the sea that her brother had longed for in thirst and weariness, and had never in life beheld, they say.

‘ Well, all this time Bronze would never leave her. He was at her feet in the boats, at her side in the woods and on the shore, against her door by night, and continually within her shadow in the day.

‘And Gladys clung to him beyond everything. “You see he is all I have left, and he, too, knew *them*,” she would say to Margett. I suppose she meant her dead people. Bronze had never left her, not an hour, I think, save twice in the rough weather time: once when he went to seek for some men lost on the downs above in a snow-drift; and once, on a wild night, when a cobble (smuggling a brandy keg or two, in truth) was wrecked on a rock hard by, and he swam to it, and brought safe to land the fisherman’s two-year-old child, who had been asleep in its cot when father, and mother, and child, and nets and tackle, and kegs and all, had been tumbled out into the sea. For these two deeds the people about, of course, thought great things of Bronze, and always brought him pieces of their freshest fish and fattest bacon; and he generally gave it almost all away, letting all the small, famished, quarrelsome, unhappy dogs of the village come about him, and share it at pleasure.*

‘Well, one summer day, in the forenoon, Gladys and Bronze were out on the shore, and I was with them. It was far in the afternoon, a splendid day,

* I have also seen a dog do this—sitting by in generous content whilst his lean brethren made feast on his goods.—ED.

with a blue sea running calm yet high. The wind was fresh and the tide was down. We wandered somewhat far out upon the beach. The great rocks, that the water always hid when it was high, were so cool, and smooth, and brown; and the gray sand between them had been all waved and marked in such pretty fashion by the waves; and all about there were such clear, bright, shallow pools, filled with the curling, sweet-smelling seaweeds, and the many-coloured stars of the sea-anemones: and then beyond, on what was always the land, the great wall of cliff, streaked with many hues, and the woods above, and the little cottages underneath, covered with fuschia and honeysuckle.

‘ We wandered far over the beach, so far that we almost reached the lip of the last lazy wave as the sea went out on its southward way, and we spent some time down there on the low sands. Gladys had with her some books and a great osier kreen that she used sometimes to cast over her shoulder as the fishwomen cast theirs, and which she in her ramble nearly filled with all kinds of sea-ribbons, and grasses, and shells, and pebbles, and of the moist brown seaweed, for which Margett had some household use. She used to look very pretty there,

with her garments tucked away to leave her delicate limbs free for motion; and her head bare to the sun; and the basket slung upon her back, filled with the trailing algæ; and her cheeks warm and her hands wet with the breath and the touch of the sea. She is a greater lady now, of course, in her velvets and lace; but, to my taste, she was lovelier then. I do not know if Lord Beltran ever thinks so. I should suppose he would; he is a man of taste, they say. He saw her so? Yes, once or twice, when he came round to that part of the coast in a schooner he has for his use. And, if I remember, he sketched her so—once.

‘Well, this noontide was very warm, and when she had filled the kreel she sat upon a rock to read. As she did so a tiny skiff, with one tiny white sail, was putting off from land, or at least from as near land as the shallow water would let it approach. Catching sight of her, the sailor with it waded back and came to her. He was a good simple fellow who lived in one of the huts of the beach, and worked sometimes with colliers, sometimes with fishing smacks. He was full of trouble now, and poured his sorrow out to her. It seemed that he had been on shore seeking her. His wife, who was on board a fish-

ing smack that lay off the land, some mile or so westward, down the coast, was very ill—dying, he feared—and had begged of him, if he could find Gladys, to entreat of her to go and speak to her. He had been compelled to come to the village for bread, and tackle, and other things he needed; and the doctor he could nowhere find. This woman was a delicate, pretty, good-living creature, and Gladys had won her heart with many little tender services in the drear winter-time gone by. It was a common thing with her to visit the people on board their vessels, for she loved nothing so well as to sail to and fro on the sea; and they had a superstitious belief in her because she was so different to themselves.

‘She told him she would come at once, and laid the wicker kreen, and the books, and a little rough waterproof cloak, upon the brown boulder on which she had been just about to make her seat, and on which Bronze and I were lying. “Come!” she called to Bronze; but the sailor stopped her. “I dursn’t take him, miss, not for our lives!” he said earnestly. “He’s the weight of a man; and the boat’s so over-crowded now with things as I’ve had to get in the Chine, that you’re to the full as much as ever I dare carry.”

“I cannot leave him!” she answered, shrinking back, and indeed she never had left him. He was always with her, whether on sea or land, and they clung passionately to one another.

“I can go and come for you again, miss,” said the fisherman ruefully; “but it will take a goodish bit of time—and Jenny so bad, and nobody but the boy with her, and the doctor not to the fore neither. Sure the dog ’ll wait for you here, miss, safe enow. Not as I’d be pressing you.”

‘But he did press her,—pressed her sorely.

‘It was very reluctantly that she was induced to leave Bronze there. Nothing save the knowledge of the value and the misery of each fleeting minute to the sick woman would ever have persuaded her. As it was, she threw her arms about him and kissed him on the forehead; then pointed to the kreel of shells and seaweed on the red smooth piece of rock.

“Take care of them, dear Bronze,” she murmured; “and wait till I come back. Wait here.”

‘She diŭ not mean to command; she only meant to console him by the appointment of some service.

‘Bronze looked in her face with eyes of woe and longing; but he made no moan nor sound, but only stretched himself beside the kreel on guard. I am

always glad to think that as she went she turned, and kissed him once again.

‘The boat flew fast over the water. When boats leave you, and drag your heart with them, they always go like that; and when they come, and your heart darts out to meet them, then they are so slow!

‘The boat flew like a seagull, the sun bright upon her sail. Bronze, left upon the rock, lifted his head and gave one long low wail. It echoed woe-fully and terribly over the wide quiet waters. They gave back no answer,—not even the poor answer that lies in echo.

‘It was very still there. Nothing was in sight except that single little sail shining against the light, and flying—flying—flying.

‘Now and then you could hear a clock striking in the distant village, the faint crow of a cock, the far-off voices of children calling to one another.

‘But where we were, there was quite silence, for the things of the sea are so noiseless. The little sea-mouse stole athwart a pool; the gray sea-crabs passed like a little army; the tiny sea creatures that dwelt in rosy shells thrust their delicate heads from their houses, to peep and wonder at the sun. But all was noiseless. How dared they make a sound, when

that great sea, that was at once their life and death, was present with its never-ceasing "Hush!"

'Bronze never moved, and his eyes never turned from the little boat that went and left him there—the little boat that fast became merely a flash and speck of white against the azure air, no bigger than the breadth of a sea-gull's wings.

'An hour drifted by. The church clock on the cliffs had struck four times; a deep-toned, weary bell, that tolled for every quarter, and must often have been heard, at dead of night, by dying men, drowning unshriven and unhouselled.

'Suddenly the sand about us, so fawn-hued, smooth, and beautifully ribbed, grew moist, and glistened with a gleam of water, like eyes that fill with tears.

'Bronze never saw: he only watched the boat. A little later the water gushed above the sand, and gathering in a frail rippling edge of foam, rolled up and broke upon the rock.

'And still he never saw: for still he watched the boat.

'Awhile, and the water grew in volume, and filled the mouse's pool till it brimmed over, and bathed the dull grasses till they glowed like flowers;

and drew the sea-crabs and the tiny dwellers of the shells back once more into its wondrous living light.

‘And all around the fresh tide rose, silently thus] about the rocks and stones; gliding and glancing in all the channels of the shore, until the sands were covered, and the grasses gathered in, and all the creeping, hueless things were lost within its space; and in the stead of them, and of the bronzed palm-leaves of weed, and of the great brown boulders gleaming in the sun, there was but one vast lagoon of shadowless bright water everywhere.

‘And still he never saw: for still he watched the boat.

‘I roused him, and he looked; only one fleeting look. His eyes went back to the gleam of the distant sail.

‘By this time the tide, rolling swiftly in before a strong sou’wester, had risen midway against the rock on which we had been left; and was breaking froth and foam upon the rock’s worn side. For this rock alone withstood the passage of the sea: there was nought else but this to break the even width of water. All other things save this had been subdued and reopen.

‘ And the sea so long has reaped side by side with the reaper Death, that it reaps full sure and true, and will leave nothing ungarnered.

‘ “ Will you die there ? ” I cried to him.

‘ “ If so it be willed,” he made answer.

‘ “ Are you mad ? See the waters ! ”

‘ “ I see them.”

‘ “ See them ! and know they are death ? ”

‘ “ I know they are death.”

‘ “ But you could swim to the shore ? ”

‘ “ Yes.”

‘ “ Then why do you tarry here ? ”

‘ “ I must tarry till she comes.”

‘ “ Though it is death ? ”

‘ “ Though it is death.”

‘ “ But that is madness ! ”

‘ “ It is duty.”

‘ “ To die, choked by the sea, is duty ? ”

‘ “ To die, any how, at one’s post.”

‘ “ But she had forgotten.”

‘ “ That may be. But she bade me wait.”

‘ “ Then you will wait for your death ! ”

‘ “ I must wait for whatever chances.”

‘ By this, the sea had risen within the height of the rock by the breadth of a man’s two fingers. It

was all deep water around ; and the water glowed a strange emerald green, like the green in a lizard or snake. The shore, that had looked so near, now seemed so far, far off ; and the woods were hidden in mist, and the cottages were all blurred with the brown of the cliff, and there came no sound of any sort from the land—no distant bell, no farm-bird's call, no echo of children's voices. There was only one sound at all ; and that was the low, soft, ceaseless murmuring of the tide as it glided inward.

‘ I entreated him again.

‘ Again the same answer returned.

‘ The waters rose till they touched the crest of the rock ; but still he never moved. Stretched out upon the stone, guarding the things of her trust, and with his eyes fastened on the sail which rose against the light, he waited thus—for death.

‘ I urged no more, but struck off towards land. I was light, and a strong swimmer. I had been tossed on those waves from my birth. Buffeted, fatigued, blind with the salt sea spray, drenched with the weight of the water, I struggled across that calm dread width of glassy coldness, and breathless reached the land.

‘ By signs and cries I made them wot that some-

thing needed them at sea. They began to get ready a little boat, bringing it down from its wooden rest on high dry ground beneath the cliff. Whilst they pushed and dragged through the deep-furrowed sand I gazed seaward. The shore was raised; I could see straight athwart the waters. They now were level with the rock; and yet he had never moved.

‘The little skiff had passed round the bend of a bluff; and was out of his sight and ours.

‘The boat was pushed into the surf; they threw me in. They could see nothing, and trusted to my guidance.

‘I had skill enough to make them discover whither it was I wanted them to go. Then, looking in their eagerness whither my eyes went, they saw him on the rock, and with a sudden exercise of passionate vigour, bent to their oars and sent the boat against the hard opposing force of the resisting tide. For they perceived that, from some cause, he was motionless there, and could not use his strength; and they knew that it would be shame to their manhood if, within sight of their land, the creature who had succoured their brethren in the snow, and saved the two-year child from the storm,

should perish before their sight on a calm and unfretted sea and in a full noon sun.

‘ It was but a furlong to that rock ; it was but the breadth of the beach, that at low water stretched uncovered ; and yet how slowly the boat sped, with the ruthless tide sweeping it back as fast as the oars bore it forward !

‘ So near we seemed to him that one would have thought a stone flung from us through the air would have lit far beyond him : and yet the space was enough, more than enough, to bar us from him, filled as it was with the strong adverse pressure of those low, swift, in-rushing waves.

‘ The waters leaped above the summit of the rock, and for a moment covered him. A great shout went up from the rowers beside me. They strained in every nerve to reach him ; and the roll of a fresh swell of water lifted the boat farther than their uttermost effort could achieve, but lifted her backward—backward to the land.

‘ When the waters touched him he arose slowly, and stood at bay like a stag upon a headland, when the hounds rage behind, and in front yawns the fathomless lake.

‘ He stood so that he still guarded the things of

his trust ; and his eyes were still turned seaward, watching for the vanished sail.

‘ Once again the men, with a loud cry to him of courage and help, strained at their oars, and drove themselves a yard’s breadth farther out. And once again the tide, with a rush of surf and shingle, swept the boat back, and seemed to bear her to the land as lightly as though she were a leaf with which a wind was playing.

‘ The waters covered the surface of the rock. It sank from sight. The foam was white about his feet, and still he stood there—upon guard. Everywhere there was the brilliancy of noontide sun ; everywhere there was the beaming calmness of the sea, that spread out, far and wide, in one vast sheet of light ; from the wooded line of the shore there echoed the distant gaiety of a woman’s laugh. A breeze, softly stirring through the warm air, brought with it from the land the scent of myrtle thickets and wild flowers. How horrible they were—the light, the calm, the mirth, the summer fragrance !

‘ For one moment he stood there erect ; his dark form sculptured, lion-like, against the warm yellow light of noon ; about his feet the foam.

‘Then, all noiselessly, a great, curled, compact wave surged over him, breaking upon him, sweeping him away. The water spread out quickly, smooth and gleaming like the rest. He rose, grasping in his teeth the kreel of weed and shells.

‘He had waited until the last. Driven from the post he would not of himself forsake, the love of life awoke in him : he struggled against death.

‘Three times he sank : three times he rose. The sea was now strong, and deep, and swift of pace, rushing madly in ; and he was cumbered with that weight of osier and of weed, which yet he never yielded, because it had been her trust. With each yard that the tide bore him forward, by so much it bore us backward. There was but the length of a spar between us, and yet it was enough !

‘He rose for the fourth time, his head above the surf, the kreel uplifted still, the sun-rays full upon his brown weary eyes, with all their silent agony and mute appeal. Then the tide, fuller, wilder, deeper with each wave that rolled, and washing as it went all things of the shore from their places, flung against him, as it swept on, a great rough limb of driftwood. It struck him as he rose ; struck him across the brow. The wave rushed on ; the

tide came in ; the black wood floated to the shore : he never rose again.

‘ And scarcely that span of the length of a spar had parted us from him when he sank !

‘ All the day through they searched, and searched with all the skill of men sea-born and sea-bred. The fisher, whose little child he had saved in the winter night, would not leave him to the things of the deep. And at sunset they found him, floating westward, in the calm water where the rays of the sun made it golden and warm. He was quite dead : but in his teeth there still was clenched the osier kreel, washed empty of its freight.

* * * * *

‘ She grieved for him ?

‘ Yes. She was as one mad with grief awhile ; crying out that he was her only friend upon earth ; and that it was through her that death had come to him.

‘ But human grief passes so swiftly ; see—you have heard her laugh to-day ! They buried him there ; on the shore underneath the cliff, where a great wild knot of myrtle grows, and the honey-suckle blooms all over the sand. And when Lord Beltran in that autumn came, and heard how he had

died in the fulfilling of a trust, he had a stone shapen and carved; and set it against the cliff, amongst the leafage and flowers, high up where the highest winter tide will not come. And by his will the name of Bronze was cut on it in deep letters that will not wear out, and on which the sun will strike with every evening that it shall pass westward above the sea; and beneath the name he bade three lines be chiselled likewise, and they are these:

‘ HE CHOSE DEATH RATHER THAN UNFAITHFULNESS.

HE KNEW NO BETTER.

HE WAS A DOG.’





CHAPTER VI.

‘MILORD, THE HAWK.’

THREE or four days passed in like manner, and I grew attuned to the gracious harmonies of pleasure and of riches. I wore my blue rosette, without too bitterly remembering the coat of La Pipetta; and I basked in the fireside warmth, without too poignantly recalling the icy moonlit nights in the drear Parisian garret. I had the blood of aristocrats in me, though I had been reared in a rush basket in a cottage; and to my temper all ease and elegance seemed even as a second nature. You shall keep the plebeian in a palace a score of years, and he shall ever wear his purple, and bear his orb, as though

the one were a suit of rags and the other a ball of lead. But you shall keep the patrician in a hovel a score of years, and he shall ever wear his hempen shirt and bear his reaper's sickle, as though the one were a princely robe and the other a knightly sword. *Bon sang ne peut mentir*; and against a throne it will cry out, 'Ye who sit there are sots and fools!' and from a beggar's eyes it will say with a challenge, 'My fathers once ruled in the land!' It cannot lie; and perhaps it is for that reason that the old blood is now hated, in an age which has exalted lying to a science—the one supreme social science of Success.

I was soon perfectly at home in this pretty *maisonnette*; but I was no nearer to penetration of its mysteries — if mysteries indeed there were. Gladys read her days away; her men friends came and went; the atmosphere was always full of flowers and birds, songs and pleasant voices, all the colours of art, and all the movements of thought. She lived in utter solitude here; but the world came to her on the tongues of those who knew it best; and all that was new, or rare, or welcome seemed to find its way to her; and, if at night she went to the physical and mental fatigues

of the stage, she went also to the brilliancy of victory and to the sustenance of homage.

I could not marvel that she was happy ; happy with the vague, untroubled, slumbrous happiness of a dream. Too happy, surely, I thought, for shame to rest with her. I was perplexed ; I was troubled ; I could scarcely doubt that some wrong there was of necessity somewhere : but yet—when she came to me, and lifted me against her sweet rich lips, and murmured gentle words to me of that night when we had been first in wretchedness and solitude together, I could not disbelieve her innocence. I could not credit that the fair lone child, whom I had seen kneel down in prayer, had grown in this brief time callous and dishonoured.

Besides—the cream was so rich ; the cushions were so soft ; the cakes were so sweet ; the hands that combed my curls were so gentle. I resigned myself to enjoy them, asking not if the source of my good fortune were tainted. It was wrong, I know ; very wrong in the creeds of my race. I became almost as selfish as though I were human !

On the fifth night after my arrival I contrived to esconce myself under the sealskins, and to revisit the Coronet unrepulsed.

I found it, as Fanfreluche had said, far more attractive than ere the rioters had wrought their wild work on it. Looking on the body of the house from the side, I saw that, in every detail, the artistic taste of its lordly lessee had prevailed over all considerations of economy. It was indeed a model theatre. The hangings were of amber satin; the panels of the boxes contained charming little landscapes; the private boxes, of which there were many, were like tiny boudoirs, with their mirrors, their lounging chairs, and their lace curtains. The musicians played out of sight; the place of the former orchestra was filled by a moss-covered bank covered with evergreens and flowers. The officials were all good-looking girls, dressed in a pretty costume of blue slashed with silver. Out of the first corridor was a spacious smoking-room, with easy couches and a supply of the evening papers, where men could enjoy their cigars in the *entr'actes* without annoying any woman. All was light, bright, luxurious, fantastic, as befits a place that is the abode of amusement, and depends for success on the compensation which it offers to people for leaving their dinner-tables immediately after the ice.

It was as choice, as artistic, as seductive, as

suggestive of every indolent enjoyment as a *bonbonnière* painted by Fragonard and fitted by Siraudin; and all that was fashionable and aristocratic in the town came to it. And yet I heard a man, whom I did not know, say on the staircase to another:—

‘Charming! perfectly charming! But it can’t pay!’

And the other, in whom I recognized Dudley Moore, answered—

‘It would pay if Beltran were Farquhar; if Gladys Gerant were Laura Pearl; if the music were from Canterbury Hall instead of the great composers; if the entertainment were witless buffoonery instead of delicate art; if everything were not what it is, in a word, which is the common recipe for the regeneration of all matters!’

‘Why say that?’ urged his companion. ‘It was all you describe under the old *régime*, and it was a dead loss also then!’

Dudley Moore took snuff.

‘Ah! Our clever lessee has a knack of always falling in love with all his First Actresses. I don’t know how any theatre *can* pay under those circumstances.’

I had no business on the grand stairs ; and I scurried away and took shelter in the dressing-room of Gladys.

It was tiny, as all such rooms in a theatre are ; but it was tastefully fitted up with white and rose. No one ever came there, save her maid. She was alone, sitting still and thoughtful. She was dressed for *Lady Teazle*, and her face looked so youthful and so ‘flower-like’ in its contrast with the powdered coiffure and the magnificent costume of brocade and of satin, with its train of cloth of gold, and the great cross of diamonds which glittered on her throat.

It seemed a strange career for one so young ; a strange fate for a child reared in the grave pastoral simplicity of what must have been an almost puritan household. Yet that she was happy in it there could be no doubt ; and that it had in no way tainted the proud purity of her nature seemed almost as little to be questioned.

I gazed at her, marvelling greatly, reasoning, as society doubtless reasoned, that a creature of her years, of her utter desolateness, of her absolute pennilessness, could never have come to be seated there, with the homage of all fashionable

London hers, with those diamonds on her breast, with those golden robes trailing behind her, with that theatre for her arena, and its owner for her only friend, unless with all these vanities and all these successes she had not also accepted the usual price paid for them—dishonour!

And yet I could not look thus at her without shame for this thought. Despite her beauty, despite her position, despite her luxurious little villa, despite even that matchless rose-diamond cross, gleaming above the beating of her heart, it seemed impious to doubt that the dead boy's sister was one whit less innocent than when she had knelt down in the moonlight to pray for Harold—one whit less nobly proud than when she had repulsed the offered charities of the little dancer. The eyes were dreaming, indeed, looking far away, with the imaginative, poetic gaze of ‘one who beholds visions;’ but there was not in them the look of one who gazes backward at a sin.

Though the diamonds seemed to me like the orbs of a snake—a snake that coils about a woman never to let her free again—yet I could not believe that she, though thus transformed, could be less fit to meet her father's sight than when she had stood

beside him to read the Scriptures aloud at even-song, in the old homestead of her birth. Evil might be about her ; but surely, I thought, evil had not as yet consumed her.

As she rose and opened her door there came in from the body of the theatre the ringing music of the orchestra, the buzz of the talking audience, the sounds of a rapidly filling house ; the scent of some costly hothouse bouquets that had been sent her, and which her maid was bringing in ;—I shivered and sickened. In this world—the world of Laura Pearl—was it possible for any woman to hold her honour, to retain her dignity ?

At that moment she was called, and passed on to the stage. The piece played that night was the perennial ‘School for Scandal.’

In such pure comedy and elegant art she was supreme, they said ; though her still greater triumphs were in parts of pathos and of power.

Lady Teazle is a rôle which any actress who is graceful and a gentlewoman can play with ease. There are but little light and shade in it ; and there is not any kind of passion. But even here there was so much grace in her ; all conventional readings were so utterly discarded ; there were such

charming alternations of playful piquance and of scornful dignity; whilst over the whole was cast the ineffable charm of a youth so seductive, that I no longer wondered at the celebrity with which the town had crowned her.

She was so entirely self-unconscious, too; so utterly negligent of the public that hung on her words: she played as a lovely woman might play for her own pleasure before her mirror, with none standing by; given with all this her personal beauty and her grace of motion, it was no wonder that even Dudley Moore confessed himself for once ‘satisfied.’

‘You play that perfectly, my dear,’ said the great critic, coming behind the scenes.

‘Yet you say that they will never come to see anything that is even good,’ said Gladys, with a smile and a movement of her head backward to the crowded house.

‘They will always come to see a pretty woman,’ returned the censor curtly. ‘I know too much of human nature ever to have denied *that*. What beautiful diamonds you have! They are new?’

‘Lord Beltran lends them to me. They are his family jewels.’

‘That has luckily not been his habit before with his First Actresses,’ murmured Dudley Moore, as she passed on to the stage again. ‘If it had been, he would not have had them to lend now. If this child understand her “droits de largesse,” the Beltran diamonds are lost to the House.’

I thought that, with all his knowledge of human nature, the great critic did not very much understand Gladys Gerant.

When the comedy was over I found my way to that pretty chamber over which the marble god and dancing girl of Goethe presided. When I entered it was empty; but the chandelier was lighted, and on the table stood some ice, and wines, and fruits. Supper was rarely had here now, except on occasions when its lessee himself entertained after the first representation of a new piece, or on the opening night of the season. But she was accustomed to receive here, for an hour or so after her performance, all personal friends or persons of celebrity. The number of these was kept exclusively and carefully narrowed; and the *cordon* that was drawn around this place was quite as rigid in its way as that before the doors of a great duchess’s drawing-room.

I had scarcely been there a moment ere Beltran and Denzil entered together. They had been dining with the Duke of Holyrood. Dudley Moore, Guiliadene, and one or two others followed; chatted of the gossip of the hour; lighted some rose-scented cigars; and drank some of the hissing iced waters.

In a little while she joined them, dressed in that simple black velvet, without jewel or ornament of any sort, except here and there a touch of old point lace, which always became her, I thought, almost better than any other fashion of attire.

The fire burned brightly, whilst its rosy glow beamed on the marble beauty of the god; the scent of the bouquets placed there in glass and china filled the air; the news of the hour passed laughingly from mouth to mouth; now and then Denzil struck out from the piano in the recess some deep full chords of German melody, or some half-gay, half-pathetic cadence of soft Irish song. It was all pleasant, amusing, blameless enough:—but I suppose it would have been vain to tell the town that the society gathered round an actress in her supper-room was to the full as refined as, and not a whit more harmful than, the society gathered round a young peeress at her afternoon tea-table.

‘The exception proves the rule,’ runs your proverb: but why, I wonder, is it that you always only believe in the Rule, and are always utterly sceptical as to the existence of the Exception?

‘Why are people still amused by Sheridan, but always bored by Shakespeare?’ propounded the mighty Editor, as Denzil brought to a close a buffo song of some Neapolitan composer, in which his voice had filled the room with melody.

‘Why do people only tolerate Sheridan, and go into ecstasies over burlesques?’ said Beltran.

‘Because we want to laugh and not to think,’ said Denzil. ‘Now, to laugh at Sheridan you must first think with him.’

‘That is begging the question,’ said Dudley Moore. ‘I don’t want to know what the great mass of fools may do; I want to know why people of intelligence and taste, who fully appreciate the riches of Shakespeare when they read him, are bored—undeniably bored—by him on the stage?’

He turned to Gladys, and she smiled.

‘They will come to my *Beatrice*.’

‘No answer! They come because you look like a picture; though they might prefer even your picture if set in Offenbach. What I ask is,—why

is Shakespeare a drug on the English stage, ennui to audiences, and perdition to managers?’

‘If it be so,—I think it is this. The Shakesperian plays are all so utterly unlike our own life,—it is so utterly impossible that men and women could ever have spoken such verse as that, their words and deeds are so immeasurably removed from all kindred with the language and the actions of this present time, that when called from the world of the imagination, and presented visibly on the stage, they weary the audience where they do not strike it with an irresistible sense of incongruity and ridicule. It would be the same with any of the great dramas of antiquity, with those of Euripides, or Sophocles, if we could play them. The more cultured the mind the more impatient does it grow of any attempt to clothe in palpable shape any of the sublime ideals of a great poet. Besides, surprise and expectation are charms essential to the drama for all minds. How is it possible for people to be either excited or surprised by plays that they have been more or less familiar with ever since they learned to spell?’

‘That is partially true,’ said Dudley Moore. ‘I am disposed to agree with you that high culture makes the visible personation of a poetic ideal both

distasteful and vulgar. High culture needs no aids to its imagination. But why, then, do the French, the most cultivated people as a whole of the world, still care so much for their Phèdre and its like ?'

'The French are naturally more declamatory than we are,' said Beltran. 'Attitude and sublime diction do not strike them with the same sense of unnaturalness that it strikes us. They are always *posing*, in school life, in home life, in public life. Besides—the workmen flock to see Racine, specially when Racine is to be had gratis ; but the idle people have much the same preference for Hervé and Offenbach that we have.'

'And it is ridiculous to quote the French,' averred Denzil, 'in any sort of dramatic contrast with us. Though they have not to my thinking one poetic drama in their language, except Victor Hugo's, they have excellences of every other kind,—in the intellectual, the social, the satirical play, they are unapproachable.'

'And then such power of adaptation in their actors !' pursued Beltran. 'Such mutations, such ease, such effortless eloquence, such inimitable art ! If we had such actors we might perhaps tempt some English Hugo or Sardou to give his talents to the

stage instead of to the novel, or the dinner-table. As it is, no genius or wit will write for our stage, on which he knows but too well that his gentlemen will be represented by counter-jumpers, his repartees be given with grins and “gag,” and his good society be rendered by a *replica* of Margate or Cremorne.’

‘All this,’ said the Editor doggedly, ‘chiefly brings us back to Denzil’s first proposition,—that most educated people dislike to think ; ergo, are fools. A curious fact, if true, and not in favour of education.’

‘I deny your deduction. It may be because we think over-much—in our science, our profession, our jurisprudence, our intellectual composition, our political career, or whatever be the pursuit which we follow—that we are disinclined to think in a place of mere amusement, after our dinners.’

‘It would seem, then, that the decline of the drama resolves itself into a mere question of eating.’

‘You are very perverse,’ said Denzil. ‘What I say is,—that the mind is always so highly strained at its work in our day, that it refuses to make any additional effort in its mere relaxations. When you have been thinking all day, with little pause or

peace, you do not want to think in the evening, when your mental strain is relaxed : you want light, gaiety, noise, pretty pictures—something that needs no thought whatever.’

‘And culture, though it have heightened one kind of imagination, has deadened another. And it has also sharpened the sense of ridicule,’ said Gladys. ‘In the old time people wept for Imogen, and loved with Romeo, without any one of the aids to fancy of what we call “scenic effect.” But—now you would only laugh at the most poetic Juliet if she played as she did of old, with a sign-post behind her that said, “this is Verona !” And even with all the aids of admirable scenery, how seldom you seem to forget for one moment that you are sitting out a play ! How seldom we can beguile you into the sweetest homage to us of all—delusion !’

‘I don’t think *you* need say so,’ said Beltran. ‘But I admit it is difficult. We are not imaginative—in that way. We are moved more now-a-days indirectly—by suggestion, by allusion, by a line in a poem, a meaning in a picture, a gleam of insight in a writer, than we are by the broader and more direct appeals to our fancy of the drama. A generation which has found out that the moon is only a

dried-up ball, and the Ultima Thule only a bit of water, that Wallace never lived, and Joan of Arc never died, may be pardoned for not very easily yielding itself to delusions.’

‘And therefore burlesques on delusions suit us best,’ said Denzil. ‘When we feel tickled at hearing Medea bawl that she’ll whip her children, or Œdipus smash his tinted spectacles in a passion, we are amused, because, without knowing it, we feel a comical likeness, in such caricatures, with the strong tendency of our own time to dwarf all heroism, and make absurd all dignities.’

‘That sounds fearfully subtle, Derry,’ said Beltran, ‘but I doubt if audiences like burlesques for any other reason than because they are nonsensical, showy, and full of jingling rhymes and catching music. And why shouldn’t they like them? They can’t be less intellectual than the old Farce was; and certainly they are much prettier.’

‘All this,’ cried Dudley Moore, ‘does not answer my question, Why does Sheridan keep his ground so much better than Shakespeare?’

‘She answered you as to Shakespeare,’ replied Beltran. ‘As for Sheridan—he amuses us because his satires suits us so well still, and his characters

are our own people disguised in wig and powder. Our society is artificial, passionless, insincere. So is his. He is a mirror in which we see our own faces, it is the costume only that differs.'

'But we should not be driven to use a mirror sixty years old if there were any quicksilver of wit extant wherewith to set up another,' said Dudley Moore. 'If the English stage be ever again to be worth anything,—which I doubt lies not in its destinies,—it must be rendered so not by revivals of King John or of Comus, but by plays which shall faithfully show and unscrupulously satirize modern society. Our society is never represented on the stage:—we have steam-engines, fire-engines, police courts, gin palaces, cabs and horses, pots and pans, all to the life, inimitably; but Society, *our* Society,—that wonderful mass of indifference, intelligence, ennui, energy, licentiousness, decorum, corruption, and conventionality!—is utterly unrepresented. On not one single stage do we ever see anything even dimly resembling the life of men and women of the world. Now, this must indicate one of two things, either that the power of satire and of representation is altogether dead, or that it finds in literature the vent that half a century ago it found upon the stage.'

‘The latter, no doubt,’ said Denzil.

‘You think so, of course, as you write novels,’ assented the great censor. ‘But there is another reason too—Society, like most fashionable dames, is fond of self-delusion, and is very apt to break in shivers the mirror that reflects her *décolletée* too faithfully. Now, the novelist is a painter who draws his portrait on canvas which a stone or two of censure will not break; but the playwright’s fragile glass falls to atoms unless braced in a gilded frame of popularity. Critical hostility is often the breath of life to the writer; but to the actor it is absolute damnation—’

‘How many have you damned then!’

‘Ah!’ said Dudley Moore, taking snuff with an air of pleasant remembrance.

‘What a deal of words they waste over it!’ scoffed Fanfreluche to me. ‘I said all that they’ve been saying now a great deal better to you the other day in two minutes. The simple truth of the matter is that human beings love mere fun, mere prettiness, and a sprinkling of indecencies, all of which burlesques supply—only they hate a truth so; when it shows them just a little silly, and just a little childish, despite all their worshipful wisdom!’

I did not heed her much. I was lost in wonder that the child whom I had first seen with her dead bluebells, unpitied in the streets of Westminster, should have become this elegant actress, with her grace, her ease, her ready interchange of thought, her patrician calm of manner.

It was only when I saw the old childlike innocence in the eyes, the old childlike trustfulness in the beautiful arched mouth, that I could persuade myself she was in truth the same. And yet I remembered even then, in her helplessness, and her bewilderment, and her wistful, defenceless misery, there had been a certain noble pride, a certain grave repose, in this young daughter of an old Saxon race, whose forefathers had ruled as Earldermen ere ever a stone had been raised of Windsor or Warwick, of Longeat or Haddon. Race is stronger than circumstance. She had been reared in the severe simplicity of a yeoman's household, and amidst the harsh pains and privations of poverty; blown on by the winds of earth, sunned by the morning's rays, and drenched with the dews of the dawns, trusted to the freedom and the instincts of an open-air and hardy life; knowing not the world, nor the world knowing her; having no teachers

save Shakespeare and Milton, save the sunrise and sunset, save the flocks and the herds. And yet Race had conquered Accident, and vindicated her title to it—in every limb and lineament; in every motion and gesture; in the accents of her voice, in the gaze of her eyes. The world may give costume, beauty, brilliancy, beguilement, many charms, many attractions; but Race alone can give—the hands, the glance, and the voice.

‘Have you found out what she is to him, my dear?’ grinned Fanfreluche that night.

‘What do people say?’ I asked cautiously.

‘As if there were two opinions!—My dear—is it possible for a woman not twenty, without any sort of kith or kin; famous on the stage; living alone, in a charming villa with only men of rank for her companions, rich enough to drive in her own carriage and to give her own dinners, is it possible for her to have any verdict save one pronounced on her by Society?’

‘Society’s verdicts are often unjust?’

‘Perhaps. But Society is a *Vehm-Gericht* from whose sentences there is no appeal. You may have all the innocence in life, yet if the dagger stick through you and the red hand point at you,

why—your innocence is very little odds to anybody.’

‘But I am sure—’

‘What’s the good of buts, my dear? If people choose to occupy questionable positions, they shouldn’t murmur because Society looks on them as questionable characters. The lamb that wore a wolf’s skin couldn’t with justice complain if its flock ran away aghast from it.’

‘But, with Society, it is the wolves who pretend to be horrified at what they know well to be a lamb, much purer than they themselves are!’

‘Ah well! Then that only shows what a fool the lamb is not to become a wolf altogether—fangs as well as skin—and so get a brotherhood with the strong ones! Nothing is so bad for a woman as to *be* innocent and to *look* guilty: she gets the sympathies of neither side, and finds herself out in the cold altogether.’

‘You believe Gladys only slandered, then?’

‘My dear, I have seen moths in candles that were only singed,—to begin with!’

‘But he is so gentle to her, so generous to her! Fanfreluche grinned.

‘Did ever you hear of the hawk who took into his protection a wood dove? There was not a

question but that Milord the hawk could, better than any one else, preserve her from all the perils of the woods ; all traps, and nets, and gins ; all ambuscaded sportsmen, all wandering night-owls, and above all, from all the wiles and ways of hawks themselves, for who should know these so well ? And yet—when one fine day Milord the hawk took the fancy of a nice dove for his own eating, I am half afraid she did not find herself to be in such perfect security after all ! ’

‘Beltran has no such treachery in him ! ’

‘My dear, he has been a hawk all his days, and it can’t be supposed that he can change his nature. Birds of prey never do.’

I soon came to know that Fanfreluche was right. Of the relation of Gladys to her friend the town had but one opinion.

It judged from the surface, as it always does judge—therefore fallaciously. Appearances are so and so, hence facts must be so and so likewise, is Society’s formula. This sounds mathematical and accurate ; but as facts, nine times out of ten, belie appearances, the logic is very false. There is something, indeed, comically stupid in your satisfied belief in the surface of any parliamentary or public

facts that may be presented to you, varnished out of all likeness to the truth by the suave periods of writer or speaker. But there is something tragically stupid about your dogged acceptation of any social construction of a private life, damned out of all possibility of redemption by the flippant deductions of chatterbox or of slanderer.

Now and then you poor humanities, who are always so dimly conscious that you are all lies to one another, get a glimpse of various truths from some cynical dead man's diary, or some statesman's secret papers. But you never are warned: you placidly continue greedily to gobble up, unexamined, the falsehoods of public men; and impudently to adjudicate on the unrevealed secrets of private lives.

Ah, if *we* could write your archives!—we who lie under your council-chambers, and sleep by your emperors' pillows, and watch your statesmen in the dead of the night, and see your mistresses in their solitude, and hear your absent friends when they speak of you, what a revelation there would be! I scarce can decide which you would find the falser, your mistress's kiss or your newspaper's news. I hardly know which would be

the more at variance with their professions, the friend’s opinion or the statesman’s soliloquy. I do not think that any two members of society would keep on speaking terms; I doubt very greatly if any two lovers would remain in love; but there would be very few wars conjured up, I fancy, because leading articles would go out of fashion; and there could hardly remain any political differences, because you would see that all political creeds revolve themselves into the old moss-trooper’s formula,—‘Grab a’ ye may, an’ fire the rest!’

Could I have told the town that there was no life simpler than this of Gladys Gerant’s; that there was no honour higher than that of this yeoman’s daughter; that her friend had never touched even her hand with his lips; that although a beautiful and courted celebrity, she hardly knew more of the world’s evil now than when she had been in her father’s homestead; that of the darker lines of her career she had no knowledge, but lived in an idealic sphere of fair faiths and of golden fancies; could I have told them this—the mere truth, as I came to find it—none would have believed me.

And yet the truth it was. Life had opened before her like a dazzling wonder flower; and she

had taken it without question, and rejoiced in it without fear.

As I came to know later, Beltran had glided imperceptibly into his present relations with her. His pity had been first aroused for the helpless, lonely, graceful child; there had been much in her to charm the taste of a fastidious and cynical man of the world; he had been interested, which was not with him of common occurrence; and he had discovered in her singular abilities, which it had pleased him to develope. His first gifts to her he had induced her to accept by leading her to believe them the fruits of her brother's talent; when it was no longer possible to sustain this delusion, he had placed her in a career where he could continue them to her as the fruits of her own gifts. As it chanced, her success in that career proved singularly great; yet not so great that it could, of itself, have brought her in so brief a space all the pleasures and all the luxuries which he contrived she should enjoy. —

Owing to him she never traversed all the steep and weary steps of that winding stairway of struggle and privation by which most actresses are forced to toil. She never knew the bitterness of probation, the fury of adverse cliques, the insults of opposition,

the slow agony of humiliating ordeals; all the antagonism, annoyance, and insult inseparable to her career, were warded off from her, and whatever he might encounter of them, none of it touched her. From the first he had led her to look to him for the guidance of her life; from the first he had never allowed her to suppose that any of the gold she received was his. The wage of the theatre was paid to her in his treasurer's name; she never knew that he owned the house; but she believed that his interest obtained her honours. From her youth and her ignorance of all practical things he had taken the management of her affairs and interests entirely to himself. When he told her that she was rich by right of genius, she believed him, and only felt that such riches had charming uses and gracious ends.

Perhaps he had done unwisely in thus bringing her into the midst of the world, with no more knowledge of the world than a child gains from a tale of fairyland. Perhaps in the very excess of his liberality to her he erred against her. It was not a safe life for her; none knew that better than he. It was a life, moreover, whereby her name was inevitably associated with his own in injury to her.

But it had been hardly possible for him to give her any other. From the onset he had found this young creature resolute to receive no aid save such as she could be brought to believe that she had really earned. Finding in her both grace and genius, he judged it the simplest and straightest service to her to give these free scope. By her absolute desolation her fate was cast into his hands entirely; he dealt with it after the fashion of a man's liberal judgment and kindly indulgence: naturally he did not regulate it by a matron's prejudices or with a philosopher's severity.

He had ever seen the women about him surrounded with elegance, pleasure, and pretty luxuriousness; he gave her these because they appeared to him the privileges of her sex and youth; and because a lavishness in giving was a characteristic of his temper. But in all this he had been moved by the generous impulses of a gentleman: never by those cold, measured calculations of a libertine which society attributed to him.

When he had endeavoured to induce women of his own class to take interest in her, he had been baffled by their indifference or their incredulity, and could make no impression either on their cold-

ness or their scepticism. All things had combined to throw her straight into his power. That he did not abuse that power was, to my thinking, a gleam of purer gold in the tangled web of this man's life than many more virtuous men, of better repute than he, can show in theirs. He was careless, contemptuous, indifferent, hardened in many things ; holding women lightly, and setting most moralities at naught, after the manner of men of his kind. He had never been a good man, as the world counts such. He had wasted his possessions, spent his years in pleasures, and gained himself an evil name, often, perhaps, for evil he had not done : but of old, when I had first seen the kindly smile gleam in his tired gray eyes, I had known that he was more to be trusted than very many better men, and that no living thing would ever place its faith in him in vain. And even so had she now found it.

With women of the world he was as unscrupulous as occasion might need ; with other men's wives he had never been famed for discretion ; his loves had had very little heart in them, and as little scruple. He had been quite capable of forsaking with easy negligence at the end of the season the same woman whom he had wooed with courtly

beguilement at the commencement of it ; some women indeed, they said, had found that gentle manner hard as steel, and that slight smile cutting as the north wind. But all this was but Greek meeting Greek ; all these women were much as world-worn and as heartless as he, if they were more passionate and more tenacious. If here and there one of them had staked her life on his, the stake had seemed to have but little worth in it, because she who put it down was so inveterate a gamester, and had so often ventured 'all upon a cast.'

But many a man has honour who has not morality ; many a man can be touched into generosity when he cannot be induced to care for duty ; and he who smiles at all other religions may yet steadfastly obey the instinct which forbids him to abuse faith placed in him.

Such a man was he ; and being moreover of a temper that, when once moved to do either, never gave measuredly or defended feebly, he had lavished all things possible on Gladys Gerant, and from the first time that her innocent eyes had met his own had dealt with her gently, reverently, purely ; breathing no word to her that her

dead boy-brother, living, could ever have needed to avenge.

Fanfreluche had said that birds of prey cannot change their natures ; and, doubtless, you will say that it is entirely improbable that such a man could ever act thus by such a woman.

Well, I can only answer you as a little while ago I heard a novelist, as famous in the drawing-room as on cover-side and moor-side, answer his companion, when she demonstrated to him that one of his stories—a love-story, which has thrilled the hearts of many—was, charming as she and the world found it, after all very improbable.

‘Improbable?’ he repeated. ‘Improbable? Yes, no doubt it is—utterly improbable. Only, you see, it happens to be all true, every word of it. But I don’t know that that makes much difference—to your theory.’





CHAPTER VII.

'THE WOMAN AT THE LATTICE.'

THE morality of society is very beautiful. Look there,' said Fanfreluche.

It was a mild noon in March, there were sables and sealskins in the Row, but the wearers thereof were already numerous and aristocratic, and along the rails there already stood some score of dainty equipages, all with fretting horses, and some with coronetted panels.

The east still prevailed in the drift of the wind, but the ennui had departed from the smoking-rooms of the clubs. There might still be frost on the pavements, but there was fashion in the footsteps that touched them. The spring had scarce put forth her

primroses, but Christie had put forth his porcelains. The chestnuts had hardly their buds yet in embryo, but the studios had already their paintings in maturity. There were few leaves uncurled on the trees, but there were several dinner-parties given in Belgravia. The mignonettes had not begun to sprout in the window-boxes, but the love-intrigues had commenced their up-springing.

London was at its pleasantest season, when dinners are few enough to be charming; when little suppers succeed an hour or two in the stalls; when the afternoon tea gathers its chit-chat round a fire; when men and women have leisure to make amusement a pastime and not a toil; when the great race meetings are still distant enough not to absorb every thought and word; when the pictures of the year are only vaguely known by tradition and prophecy breathed from private views; when scandal, and laughter, and flirtation, and gossip, all are unjaded, and when the soul of the cook, if it breathe a sigh for its game-loves departed, is yet filled with a soft glow of comfort before its visions of salmon and quails, its possessions of lamb and asparagus.

‘Look where?’ I asked her as we passed together down the Row, where my mistress, alight-

ing from her brougham, was walking awhile, accompanied by Beltran and Guilliadene; all who passed her turning to look at that delicate face with the gleam of its golden hair, and the flush which the wind brought to its skin, set in the dark softness of sables, and velvets, and laces, as the bright hues of a porcelain painting may be set in an ebony frame.

‘Everywhere,’ returned Fanfreluche comprehensively. ‘Look round, my dear, at them all. Look at that pretty woman in chinchilla and violet. That is Lady Hilda St Maurice, who is not two-and-twenty, and who has had more “affairs” already than there are rings in her dressing-case. Last year I lived with her a few weeks; one day at luncheon time, Colonel St Maurice, her husband, you know, walked in to her with all her letters to Charles Flickers, the actor, in his hand. Dollie Flickers, his wife, who is horribly jealous of him on and off the boards, had got at them somehow, and had sent them on to St Maurice. Hilda never winced once, though he made a scene out of it. “Do be sensible, Frank,” she said when he’d stormed himself hoarse, she all the while sublimely indifferent. “People who live in glass houses, you

know—how would *you* look if we had a ‘show-up?’” And she ate a greengage as she spoke; and the Colonel was “sensible;” and Lady Hilda went next day to the drawing-room, as she will go next year.

‘Look, now, at that haughty piece of dark still beauty in her carriage: that is the Countess of Grancedieu. With her blue blood, and her immense possessions, and her stainless name, she is the very type of the lofty and chaste aristocrat. Well, I have lived with her too; and if I spoke their tongue, and told of things that I have seen as I lay in my lady’s private rooms when all the great house was still, they might maybe find that the days when Faustine called her paramour from the circus to the palace were franker and not deeply darker than ours.

‘Look, too, at that graceful creature so exquisitely painted, and dressed up to the eyes in the imperial sables; that is the Duchess of Llandrysyl. She, the greatest of great ladies, has royalty in her veins; has revived the salon; and got her husband the vacant ribbon. People say that His Grace is a gloomy, taciturn, listless, discourteous man, ill worthy of his matchless wife.

An autumn or two since my people stayed at her magnificent domain in North Wales, and I with them. One evening before dinner his voice woke me in the great, dusky, splendid library; I listened; he was there, alone, with his wife. I heard enough to pity from my soul for evermore that great noble, who was more wretched than any cottier on his lands. And yet he held his peace, has always held it, so that the bright-haired lad that will reign after him, the only child of them all that has any look of his face or his race, may never know the truth of the mother who bore him.

‘Look there, too, at that lovely, passionless-looking blonde, with all that guipure about her: that is Ida Warwick. Dudley Warwick is a baronet’s son, very poor, very idle, very—good-natured! He has about £500 a-year—and debts; Ida, a peer’s daughter, has nothing—and debts. Yet they keep a charming little house in Belgravia; give very good dinners; have the first of fruits and the choicest of wines; two high-stepping bays and an opera-box; and their creditors never trouble them. How do they do it? Well, the Duke of Holyrood’s bankers could tell, and handsome Holy’s presence is a thing of course in the bijou house. But, then,

Ida is quite “ in society ;” her children are cherubs ; her own people are fond of her ; her husband lives with her. What more would you want to please all the Proprieties ? Oh, it is a beautiful thing this morality of English Society ! Look around, my dear, and only reflect that not one of these women whom I have named, and not one of their set or their order, but would deem her fair fame polluted, and her fair dignity insulted, if only asked to know —Gladys Gerant !’

She spoke the truth : the truth not only of those few, but of many as corrupt as themselves, and of many more whose lives were really just, and whose honour was really honourable.

As Gladys passed under the leafless boughs the women of his world looked away from her, with that serene, passionless look which *ignores*, and which is far colder as it is far courtlier than any scorn. She herself, vaguely conscious of its insult but unconscious of its meaning, gave back the look with a grave proud meditation in her eyes. She dimly felt that all the women of his order held themselves aloof from her ; she thought it was because she publicly pursued an art for fame, and because she came of an old, humble, impoverished race, whose

decay all, and whose ancientness none, had known.

Of the truth she had no nearer conception : all men who came near her dealt with her with an infinite respect ; she did not dream that the mothers, and wives, and sisters of these men classed her with all that was basest and most venal. She knew that there were vile women ; often she heard men talk of them ; there were even those in her own theatre with whom he had requested her not even to exchange speech. But her knowledge of such was still vague. She thought scarcely at all of them save with a shuddering tender compassion. That she was classed amidst them never dawned, by its faintest suspicion, on her.

She was conscious of no sin ; she was proud by nature ; she was content in his protection and his friendship ; she was of a temper to which the mingled isolation and publicity of her life added both strength and sweetness ; she only knew the world as he chose to show it to her : that in the estimation of that world she was no better than Maude Delamere, no higher than Lillian Lee, no purer than Laura Pearl, was a fact that never brought its indignity within the scope of her sight or the sphere of her thoughts.

And she went now in the sunny noon of the still wintry morning, with her graceful head turned to him in happy careless speech, and a wild-rose flush brought to her cheeks by the wind; and her eyes glancing, clear as a deer’s, dauntless as a child’s, dreamy as a poet’s, at the sneering, smiling faces of those women of whom he had forbidden her to have any knowledge; and at the cold, immutable countenances of those other women who had refused to have any knowledge of herself.

I think there was something in that look which baffled, perplexed, annoyed both classes of these her foes; for as I followed her I heard one of the former mutter with a laugh, noting the delicate warmth which the wind had fanned in her face, ‘Has to rouge a’ready, by daylight!—bet Fred Bruce a pound o’ cigars that she did!’ And I heard one of the latter murmur to a friend, noting the worth of the almost priceless black Chantilly which she had gathered about her, ‘How they do imitate all laces now; did you see that? You would almost think it was real!’

Now I believe that when a woman’s own fair skin is called rouge, and her own old lace is called imitation, she must in some way or other have

roused sharply the conscience or the envy of her sisters who sit in judgment.

Fanfreluche and I, as we ran, caught many such little phrases from the peripatetics of the Row. Almost all whom we passed had some word or another as they saw her.

‘Is that the great actress?’ said a country cousin with a stare. ‘How young she looks!’

‘They know how to make themselves look young when they are seventy!’ said her companion, who no doubt was a woman that knew the world.

‘I wonder who she really was,’ said a man who had the look of the Rag about him.

‘Don’t you know?’ said his friend arm-in-arm with him. ‘She was the natural daughter of the old Duke of Holyrood by an opera-singer. I can see a likeness in her to the young Duke myself.’

‘So can I, now you name it,’ responded his ally. ‘But I have heard so many stories that—’

‘Oh, this is the perfect truth,’ interrupted the other. ‘I had it from a man who used to know old Holyrood very intimately.’

‘Is that she?’ asked a handsome young girl very eagerly. ‘Oh, I never saw a real actress out of doors before! Somebody told me they were always

so yellow by daylight. But she is as fair—’

‘As you are,’ added the man with her, apparently her brother. ‘Actresses are the prettiest women we have. “My face is my fortune, sir, she said,” is true of an actress, if not of the traditional milk-maid of the song.’

‘Oh, if I were but as lovely!’ sighed the girl, who could only have been ‘just out,’ and unspoiled by lovers and ladies-maids. ‘And what beautiful furs, and what exquisite lace! Ah, I am so glad you have got those stalls for to-night! And it is such a pretty name, too—Gladys Gerant. Is it really her name?’

‘Heavens, no! I dare say her real name’s Mary Stubb, or Martha Grubb, or something as euphonious,’ laughed the brother, moving her onward.

‘Who is she really?’ murmured an elegant woman, whom I knew to be Lady Cississiter, to her companion who had the look of a Bow-Window frequenter.

‘God knows!’ he responded. ‘Last thing they say is that her father’s one of Beltran’s gamekeepers; and that the keeper cut up rough about dishonour and all that, and got firing at him from a cover, Irish fashion, last time he was down at his

own place. Keeper missed him by a hair's-breadth; and is put away somewhere in an asylum. Wish we could do as much by the Ribbonmen.'

'Very romantic!' said Lady Cississiter with a little incredulous contempt. 'What sables those are she has! Really, how preposterous!—'

Whether she meant the keeper's vengeance, or the sables' worth, I know not, for she also passed onward.

'My stars, what lace!' muttered Lillian Lee, putting up her eyeglass as she checked her horse by the rails. 'By Jove, Jack, the virtuous dodge seems uncommon good to go in for—'

'I wouldn't try it if I were you,' said John Beaudesert, who rode with her. 'You wouldn't look the part—quite.'

'Beatrice Leintwardine has had an awful row with him. They'll never speak again,' said a Guardsman, meaning the Countess of Leintwardine, Beltran's sister.

'About the property?' said another who was arm-in-arm with him. 'I dare say she's fidgetty. He's got rid of all he can; and her second boy's in the entail, you know.'

'Oh, hang it, no! About the diamonds,' an-

swered the first speaker. ‘He’s given the Beltran diamonds to that girl, and the Leintwardines are furious.’

‘The deuce! that’s a new trick,’ murmured his friend. ‘Awfully pleasant. All St John’s Wood and Brompton will be flying at one’s family jewels now; I’m sorry he’s put it into their heads. All the racing-plate and shooting-shields will have to go next, I suppose.’

‘That’s begun. Last season Mrs Delamere asked poor old Brune to lend her his St Leger cup for her sideboard at one of her big dinners,—’

‘Oh, Lord, yes, I remember. And when he sent for it next day she wrote him word back that she “never returned gifts if people pleased to repent of them.” He raved; talked of law,—’

‘But he never went to law, and the vase is the Delamere’s now.’

‘Did you get that box at the Coronet for tomorrow, Charlie?’ asked a handsome matron of a handsome youth.

‘Couldn’t, aunt. Everything taken for a fortnight. Put our name down. But you can see her for nothing here—look.’

‘I never look at that class of persons,’ said the

handsome woman severely.

‘And yet you send me to take a box on purpose to look at her!’

‘Don’t be stupid, Charlie. That is on the stage. That is quite different.’

‘Who was she *really*?’ asked a pretty dainty widow in pearl grays and swansdown: the fortieth time that I heard the same question asked in three turns of the Row.

‘Well—really—I believe the story is this,’ returned the man with her. ‘She was the wife of a poor devil of a painter, who married her when she was fifteen. Viscount Beltran met them at Dresden, where they were living in great wretchedness; took a fancy to her; and entered into an agreement to bring her out on the stage here, and pay the husband five hundred a year to—absent himself. But they do say that the husband is waxing wroth because she makes so much money, and that we shall have the divorce on, and the whole story out before long.’

‘Dear me!’ sighed the widow, who evidently thought simplicity her own great point. ‘But that seems a very wicked thing of Lord Beltran!’

‘I never heard a good thing of him. It is

hardly so bad as some others I could tell you,’ said the speaker, who as I found afterwards was a young clerk at the War Office, who knew Beltran about as much as he knew the Queen—by sight.

‘ Pray don’t!’ murmured the widow. ‘ But how does it come, then, that she has the same name as that pretty green book you bought me? I thought somebody said she was the poor boy’s sister?’

‘ Pooh! The boy’s dead; he can’t contradict them if they do. But it is all bosh. She is the wife of this painter in Dresden. Mc Gilp, who is studying in Dresden, told me so. The name’s a mere *nom de fantaisie*, picked out of the poems.’

And they also passed on, amidst the chit-chat, the cigar-smoke, the perfumes, and the gay dresses, under the scarcely-budding boughs of Rotten Row.

‘ Mercy on me!’ said Fanfreluche. ‘ And to think all these people devoutly believe what they say! That is what is so comical. When Libel lies for a purpose it is comprehensible, if criminal; but when Gossip lies from mere wantonness it is such an awful fool; for pretending to have the eyes of an Argus it has all the blindness of a Bat!’

‘ And yet you once said that the scandals of

society, if false in the letter, are often true in the spirit,' I said, for I loved to twit her with her own would-be smart sayings.

'I never said anything so foolish,' snapped Fanfreluche. 'What I did say was that if you haven't the story you ought to have, Society always supplies you with it, as a good corset-maker supplies a poor lath of a girl with a comely figure. If you occupy an equivocal position, you clearly ought to have an equivocal history: supposing you are really innocent and have not one, Society weaves one for you—suitable in every respect if not comfortable.'

'A fire web for the glauce it enfolds,' I murmured. 'Is it true that Lady Leintwardine has quarrelled about the diamonds? She used to be very attached to her brother.'

'*Could* they speak truth here?' retorted Fanfreluche. 'No—it was not about the diamonds. Beatrice Leintwardine is far too much of a gentlewoman to dispute about *them*. It was one day last month, in the railway-carriage. Beltran and she had been down with her boy, Beaulieu, to Eton, and coming back—we were alone—she took him to task about having old Margett Llansaint living with "that

girl,” as she called Gladys Gerant : and went so far as to lament that she herself could never take any notice of faithful old Margett now that he had placed her under the same roof with—with—she did not quite finish her sentence. Beltran was looking straight at her ; and he has a way of doing that which often incommodes people. When she paused he answered her very quietly, “My dear Beatrice,” said he, “I suppose even brothers and sisters may know each other for over forty years and be strangers all the time. Since you fancy I could turn my dead mother’s old servant into a pander to my vices, the less you see of me the better, I fancy. I’ll order Beau’s new boat, and look after him down there—good-day to you.” And as the train stopped just then at a station he got out, lit a cigar, and went into a smoking-carriage. He has never spoken to her since then, and to the best of my belief never will speak to her. And yet he is much attached to Lady Leintwardine.’

‘Did he ever ask her to know Gladys?’

‘Yes, he did. He tried hard when the child first came out—and before, I think—to make the women of his own family feel some interest in her. But they were stubborn, and would not do so much as

see her ; and you know very well that he is not a man who will ask twice.'

'And yet she is as innocent as their own little children that are at play in their homes,' I cried indignantly ; for by this time I had come to the sure knowledge that, howsoever it might look in the sight of the world, this life was stainless.

'What's that to do with it, my dear ?' retorted Fanfreluche. 'She is an actress.'

'But still there are men who will believe in her ? —men beside himself ?'

'Ah, my dear,' Fanfreluche replied with much energy. 'But don't you know that whilst broad, intellectual, scepticism is masculine, narrow, social, scepticism is feminine. To get hearty, reverent, genuine belief in the innocence of a slandered woman, go to a man : where the world has once doubted, women, the world-worshippers, will for ever after doubt also. You can never bring women to see that the pecked-at fruit is always the richest and sweetest ; they always take the benison of the wooing bird to be the malison of the hidden worm !'

Which metaphoric sentence seemed to please her, for she shook her golden bells, and went to gossip with the arrogant Astolat poodle.

A little later there passed us, going to her carriage, a very handsome woman, with gleaming hazel eyes, and a haughty languid mouth.

‘That was Lady Otho!’ I cried to Fanfreluche when she rejoined me.

‘Yes, my dear. There is nothing between them now. Two autumns ago he went to Africa and she went to Rome. He potted Maneaters and she Monsignori. Love died a natural death with absence; and when they met, with the next London season, they agreed by tacit consent to bury it decently in pretty cere-clothes of courtesy. Love used to die violent deaths, you know, in the old times of passion and poignards; but now-a-days its common disease is that gentle form of atrophy called ennui, and it yawns itself softly out of existence, polite and *bien posé* to the last, like the moribund beauty who asked for fresh ruffles and rouge ere she took the last sacrament, and drew the last breath.’

‘He never cared much for her?’ said I.

‘He never cared much for anybody. And that is why all of them care so much for him. Men of the world to whom their loves are of about as much account as their cigarettes, get all the worship and all the devotion. “How can you care so

awfully for me, Effie? You know I care nothing about you," I heard a man of that sort say once to a woman who had clung to him, for years, with a vehement adoration which moved him with a little gratitude and a great deal of ennui. "I know you don't, dear," she answered him humbly; "but I think that is just why I do care for you. You see men who love us much, always look such fools to us." And she spoke with knowledge, for many much better and wiser than he had loved her.'

'And yet you sometimes say men love more truly than women?'

'So they do. I have seen fifty instances of it. But it is true that their strongest loves are not always their most legitimate. "The wife" may be poetized about and preached about, it is not always *she* of whom he thinks when he lies wide awake on a brown moonlit moor, or dull with fever in a hot sulphurous eastern city; but oftener of some fair sweet fate that might have been, or of some fond dead thing that loved him with tenderest un wisdom.'

And I think she was right.

Not very long ago I was down away in the vale of Belvoir. I stayed with my friends at a great

stately place, owned by as gallant a gentleman as ever swung himself into saddle. His wife was a beautiful woman, and he treated her with the courtliest tenderness: indeed, I often heard their union cited as one of almost unequalled felicity. ‘He never had a thought that he did not tell me!’ I heard his wife once say to a friend. ‘Not a single thought, I know, all these twelve years of our marriage.’ It was a happy belief—many women have the like—but it was an unutterably foolish one, for the minds of the best and truest amongst you are, in many things, as sealed books to those whom you care for the most.

One bitter, black, hunting-day, a day keen and cold, with frost, as men feared, in the air, and with the ground so hard that even the Duke’s peerless ‘dandies,’ perfect hounds though they are, scarcely could keep the scent, there came terrible tidings to the Hall—he had met with a crashing fall. His horse had refused at timber, and had fallen upon him, kicking his head with the hind hoofs repeatedly. They had taken him to the nearest farmhouse, insensible; even dead already, they feared. His wife and the elder amongst the beautiful children fled like mad creatures across the

brown fallows, and the drear blackened meadows. The farm, happily, was not far: I sped with them.

When they reached him he was not quite lifeless, but he knew none of them; his head had been beaten in by the plates of the kicking hoofs: and they waited for his death with every moment, in the little, old, dusky room, with its leaded lattices, and its odour of dried lavender, and its bough of holly above the hearth. For this had chanced upon Christmas Eve.

To his wife's agonies, to his children's moans, he was silent; he knew nothing; he lay with closed eyes and crushed brain—deaf, blind, mute. Suddenly the eyes opened, and stared at the red winter sun where it glowed dimly through the squares of the lattice-panes. 'Dolores!' he cried aloud, 'Dolores! Dolores!' It was the name of none there.

'My God! What woman is it he calls?' his wife asked in her torture. But none ever knew. Through half the night his faint pulse beat, his faint breath came and went; but consciousness never more returned, and for ever he muttered only that one name, that name which was not her own. And when they laid the dead body in its

shroud, they found on the left arm above the elbow, the word ‘Dolores’ marked on the skin, as sailors stamp letters in their flesh. But whose it was, or what woe or passion it recorded, none ever knew—not even his wife, who had believed she shared his every thought!—and to his grave his dead and secret love went with him.

This man was but a gay, frank, high-spirited gentleman, of no great knowledge, and of no great attainments, riding fearlessly, laughing joyously, living liberally; not a man, one would have said, to know any deep passions, to treasure any bitter memories—and yet he had loved one woman so well that he had never spoken of her, and never forgotten her; never—not even in his death-hour, when the poor, stunned, stifled brain had forgotten all other things of earth.

And so it seems to me that it is very often with you, and that you bear with you through your lifetime the brand of an unforgotten name, branded deep in, in days of passion, that none around you ever wot of, and that the wife who sleeps on your heart never knows.

It is dead—the old love—long dead. And yet, when your last hour shall come, and your senses

shall be dizzy with death, the pale loves of the troth and the hearth will fade from you, and this love alone will abide.

At that moment both Fanfreluche and I were summoned; and while Beltran walked homeward, the little brougham, with its pair of small, spirited horses, swept Gladys away to the studio of Marmion Eagle.

Marmion Eagle was as handsome as ever, and had become much more famous; so famous, indeed, that he was almost fashionable, and that where people before had talked of his insanities, they now only murmured of his eccentricities. A man may flirt as wantonly as he will with colour when once the *Midas* has pronounced that his drawing is anatomically perfect, and that his meanings, even when obscure, are always profoundly poetic; and he may indulge as he will in stalking through the Park in an olive velvet Velanquez dress, with a mahl stick in his hand, and a fez cap on his head, when once it is thoroughly well-known that he goes to the Premier's At-homes, and is admitted to the dinners of the Duchess of Llandryssill.

His fair patrician, Gwendoline, had wedded her coronet; and he had locked up in a cabinet the

miniature which he had once privily made of her, as he had met her first, when he was a wandering sketcher, under the oaks of her father’s park. But she asked him to dinner with great regularity, employed her influence to have his pictures hung on the line; and, in fine, got him much talked about. Menus and notoriety are the favourite coins with which Love pays his debts in the nineteenth century.

We were soon at his studio in the heart of the ‘wilder west,’ where the brethren of the brush do congregate. When last I had known him, his atelier had been a big and barren room, with a few casts and a bronze or two, down somewhere in Chelsea, overlooking the Thames. Now it was placed in an atmosphere that is perfumed with successful talent, and in a suburb where the carriages throng by the hundreds on ‘Art Sunday’ with every spring. And now the painting-room itself was cedar-pannelled, velvet-hung, full of beautiful hues and grand outlines.

So swiftly will the word of the *Midas* and the cards of a Duchess persuade the public that genius is a thing, eccentric no doubt, but still not absolutely damnable—even, indeed, almost deserv-

ing of a stockbroker's patronage, and of a mill-owner's cheques.

Gladys now went to give him her last sitting for a portrait which he had painted of her for that year's exhibition. He had drawn her as the Saxon daughter of Hengist, bearing in her hand the golden mazer, wherewith she bade her lord Vortigern 'Waes heal,' and gave to the high tides and holydays of England the pledge and custom of the wassail-cup.

The picture was beautiful ; and a few great connoisseurs, permitted to see it in progress, had pronounced that it would be the picture of the year, when, with the king-cups and hawthorns of May, the picture exhibition should uncloze.

The figure was life-size, clad in white, with no colour at all about it, save in the massive gold cup of wine which she bore ; in the purple border of the robe ; and in the cool pure blue of a northern sky at noon. The few great connoisseurs talked very grandly, if not very luminously, of this wondrous white ; of its purity, of its crystal clearness exempt from coldness, of its soft shadows that yet were white likewise, and of its admirable management against the azure that alone relieved it. But though

they talked thus, the true charm of the picture abode in the face which gazed out of it: the grave, tender, proud, wistful face, with its meditative eyes, and its exquisite hues, and its eloquent mouth, that had all the smile of youth, and all the sorrow of genius.

The portrait was so perfected that I believe the artist only demanded another sitting that he might have the pleasure of noting the light glow on the fair waves of hair, and of seeing the gracious form of the young actress move amongst the dusky magnificence of his atelier.

There was scarcely anything more to be done; but he stood for habit's sake touching this fold, and that detail, whilst Gladys sat on a sort of dais above, which was hung with maroon-hued velvet, and filled with soft, pale, hot-house roses—for Marmion Eagle had all that love of fragrance and beauty, of grouping and grace, which is called, not with much wisdom, the effeminacy of genius.

Presently there entered Dudley Moore, who criticized the picture with pungent acerbity, and complimented the original of it with all the sauvity of which he could when he chose be master; a little while later there sauntered in Lord Guilliadene,

who had been breakfasting with the Guards at Knightsbridge, and who was in his indolent way a dilettante of no mean knowledge or discernment; awhile after there came Beltran himself, bearing with him a small picture, and a very quaint piece of old Capo di Monte, on which he wished for Marmion Eagle's opinion.

Whilst the Capo di Monte passed from hand to hand, he set the picture before Gladys.

She looked long, and did not speak.

‘You do not like it!’ he exclaimed in some disappointed surprise.

‘It is exquisite,’ she made answer. ‘But it pains me: it is unutterably sad.’

‘Nonsense! It is only a little study of pearls and grays; I bought it for its admirable management of half-tones.’

‘It is sad,’ she answered him, ‘intensely sad. Look—it is a woman alone; a woman without hope, a woman tired, not by work or years, but by the sickness of hope deferred. It is all twilight; rue, only, blossoms in the lattice, the plant they used to give to captives at the bar; in the bowl of water a purple butterfly lies drowned; in that landscape beyond there are evening shadows, but no even-

ing stars. The whole picture has history.’

Beltran laughed.

‘ You have the swiftest and dreamiest of fancies!

The grays and the pearls would please *me* just as well if their subject were any old Ogham stone, or a gris de Flandres jug. Ned, what do you say?’

The Earl sauntered up with his eyeglass.

‘ By Jove, where’d you pick up that? I offered any money for the thing twelve months ago, and couldn’t buy it.’

Dudley Moore just then, with the Capo di Monte for a theme, had commenced one of those charming disquisitions on Art with which he would occasionally favour people: learned, ironic, sometimes abstruse, always full of suggestion, to which painter and virtuoso were alike glad to listen.

The opinions he gave forth in them were seldom indeed similar to what flowed from his pen for the *Midas*: he was one of those—they are many—who deem the Public a child to whom it is not well to tell over-much truth. In the *Midas* he would uphold that a recent National Gallery purchase was a quite undoubted Coreggio, when in private he would rend the Coreggio to atoms as the most miserable of impostors.

‘Tom Glaze, who is my particular friend, bought it; Lord Esprit, whom I always make it a point to disagree with, attacked it; and the nation itself could not tell a Raphael from a Frank Stone,’ he would say with a grim chuckle to his intimates. ‘Besides, it is infinitely amusing to hear Esprit raging like a wounded boar in the House of Lords, and to see the public on its knees before that wretched bit of canvas, begotten yesterday by some lad on the Pincian hill, who couldn’t pay his padrona’s bill. I would not disturb so admirable a farce for the world.’

And so he would calmly continue to laud the Coreggio in print, and to chuckle in private, and would atone to the public by flaying alive before it every hapless living artist he could find.

‘Modern painters do not owe you much, sir!’ said a youngster to him once, writhing under the *Midas*’ ruthless flagellation of his first Academy picture. ‘On the contrary,’ said the great censor taking his snuff. ‘They owe me much—or might have owed me much. If they had only listened to me they would have saved every shilling that they have thrown away on canvas!’

Whilst they were busied in discussion with him

I stole up to the little picture which Beltran had placed upon a low easel. There, with the soft warmth of the hothouse roses about it, I saw in its greyness, and sadness, and loneliness, the sketch of the Woman at the Lattice.

To that easel, when the great critic had left, Marmion Eagle came, and paused long before it.

'You have bought this!' he asked.

'I found it in a bric-à-brac shop the other day in Paris,' answered Beltran. 'Do you know the artist? Is it of value?'

Marmion Eagle did not answer; he was lost in thought before the little painting.

'Twelve months ago he refused its weight in gold,' he muttered after awhile.

'Who did?'

'The painter of it.'

'And why did he refuse gold then?' asked Gladys, 'and yet now lets it lie for sale in a public place?'

'Because he is no longer in love with the woman who sat for it, I imagine,' said Beltran with his slight, tired laugh. 'The Madonna that we consider priceless at Midsummer has a knack of turning, by Christmas, into a mere venal model, who may go for

whatever her charms chance to fetch ! ’

‘ Because he is no longer living,’ said Marmion Eagle gravely. ‘ To few men is it given to be able to secure fame for their work when their hand has no longer its cunning, and their brain no longer its skill.’

‘ There is a story, then ! Come, tell it us.’

‘ It is a very common story,’ answered the painter with a smile that had a little bitterness. ‘ It was only that a man had some genius, and that a woman killed it.’

Gladys, where she sat amidst the fragrance of the frail hothouse roses, turned her head towards them.

‘ The picture told us something ; but do you tell us more. It was not *that* woman who killed him ? ’

‘ This woman ?—no ! I do not know very much ; what I do know I will tell.’

He sank into a chair near her, his hand playing with the delicate bloom of the roses, the faint afternoon light falling upon the little portrait that had been painted in the drowsy golden days of summer, at the Silver Stag, with the bees booming amongst the lime blossoms, and the seeding grasses blowing in the wind.

‘ A year or more ago, Paris was mad about one young painter. Paris had seen his pictures for ten years, and refused to believe ; then suddenly it took a fit of belief, and could not atone enough. It is the public way. Only, unhappily, the public is so often like a child, and leaves its neglected bird so long to starve in an empty cage, that when it comes to caress the bird it finds but a ruffled heap of dead plumage, which cannot feel its kisses. This young man was kissed before he was dead : he had the good fortune to conceive a picture which drew the whole city to it. You will remember it ; it was called *Faustine* ? ’

‘ *Faustine* ! ’ echoed Beltran, to whom he had turned. ‘ Of course, a marvellous painting.’

‘ Well, the artist of *Faustine* painted also yonder sketch of the woman at the lattice. I wonder that you should have overlooked that sketch when it was shown in the Salon. He was offered any money for it, but he refused to sell it. “ Shall a man sell his soul ? ” he used to say ; but I believe no one knew what he meant. . I was in Paris a great deal last year, and I saw, but never spoke to, him. He was the handsomest man I ever beheld ; handsome is no word for him ; he was as beautiful as a

god. When he walked in the Bois, people turned after him as though he were a king or woman ; he was like some Phydian statue incarnated. Unhappily in an evil hour Cléopâtre saw his beauty.'

'I remember now,' murmured Beltran.

'Who was Cléopâtre ? ' asked Gladys.

'Cléopâtre ? Well,—she was Cléopâtre. Paris knew little more, neither need you. But it is told of her that when she saw the scathing satire of the Faustine, she said, "He has dared to scourge us ; very well, then, we will scourge him." I do not know whether this is true, or whether it was invented afterwards as an *apropos*. If people do not say a suitable thing, Paris always takes care that one is invented for them.

'It matters little what she said, or whether she was moved by devilish vengeance or by devilish love. She set herself to gain possession of him ; of his heart, of his passion, of his genius, of his life. She has a matchless beauty herself. She succeeded. The leaves were just budding when she saw him first, at sunset, by the lake, in the Bois ; by the time that the trees were in full foliage he had no god but his passion, no heaven but her face.

'She made him paint her portrait in the first

burning days of the summer ; and when all Paris flocked to the Cléopâtre, the Faustine was avenged. The satirist had fallen, and kissed the feet of the courtesan. Well, just so long as the portrait took to paint, just so long had he his fool’s paradise. When it was finished, and in it all Paris glorified her afresh, then she turned and laughed him to scorn, and took in his stead a gipsy-eyed prince, who came from the woods and the plains where royalty still is half-savage, and the European is half-Oriental.

‘ We know how men of the world take these things, but this painter knew the world so little. He was young, ignorant, maddened ; and he loved a woman to whom love was a jest, a scoff, a by-word of theft. It is very terrible when a man really *loves* a woman that is vile ; it is terrible—but it happens.

‘ When he was jeered at, forbidden her presence, finally thrust aside by her lacqueys, whilst she drove from her gates with the gipsy-eyed prince by her side, and the jewels of the prince on her bosom—then—this man whom she had deserted grew mad. Forgive him—he knew so little of the world, and he loved a creature without mind or soul, a splendid animal made but to prey. I think

the world does not hold a greater curse for a man than that.

‘He was mad; and he followed them on foot, turning once only aside; and that once into a place where he had used to paint, and where his colours, and draperies, and old armouries were still kept. They drove with swift horses, and he turned aside this once; yet hardly had they entered the Bois before he entered it also. I saw this, because I, myself, drove scarcely a yard behind them.

‘It was at the close of a late summer day. I had gone there, and hundreds were there also, though the city was thinning. The sun was setting. Everything was reddened by the flush. The very waters seemed dyed crimson. Everywhere there was a hot, hungry glare. I even heard the hoot of a mosquito—it did not seem to be Paris.

‘Through the clouds of dust and the throngs of people he came, as swift as a hound runs; his head was bare, his hair was streaming back, his face, commonly so fair, was dark with a rush of blood; his eyes!—I see them sometimes at night still. All his wonderful godlike beauty seemed gone; he looked like some goaded wild beast, goaded to fury, and dying.

‘He passed me like the lightning; there was a rush to stop him; but he tore through the crowd, breaking loose of all opposing hands, and darting like a meteor through the light. There was a flash—a shriek—a sudden oscillation of all the gay, laughing, pleasure-seeking mob. Through the dust I saw a straight steel dagger-blade glitter in the air; then the wind whirled, the dust rose again; I saw no more. But the voices that cried out around told me that in that moment of time he had stabbed both himself and his rival. With the prince the blow had missed of its aim, merely grazing the flesh as it passed; but he himself lay bathed in blood, in the dust, under the trampling hoofs of her horses.

‘She supped that night in the Bois, in the café by the cascade; and she laughed, and she drank, and she talked of her diamonds, as she ate the sweetmeats a duke had provided. On the whole, no doubt, she was glad; the tragedy sent her name but more loudly down the stream of the world’s babbling voices.

‘For him—they took him to the horrors of the Bicêtre. He was not quite dead: when men loathe life they are hard to kill. Life lingered

in him for five weeks—five weeks of raving fever, of intolerable torture. One burning, stormy night, a night with fire in the skies, and death in the air, his agony was ended. He died in unutterable torment, delirious to the last, gnashing his teeth like a mad dog at all who strove to draw near or aid him; and like a mad dog, dead, they buried him.'

There was a long silence as his voice sank away. When one hearer raised her head, her eyes were heavy with tears.

'And *she*?' she murmured, glancing at the portrait of the woman at the lattice.

'Ah, I know nothing of her, not even who she was,' he made answer. 'I know no more than I have told. But this was the end of his genius; and already—Paris has forgotten that ever he lived; and your friend has bought that picture for a song in a bric-à-brac den yesterday.'





CHAPTER VIII.

TOY-SOLDIERS.

IT is needless to say that I had quickly asked Fanfreluche of what had chanced to Nellie, the Wood-Elf; she had treated the inquiry with some scorn, as touching a little, half-obscure burlesque player, beneath the attention of *nous autres*.

‘My dear,’ she made answer to my renewed inquiries, ‘girls like that little Courcy always remain just where they were. They are the rank and file of the theatrical army; they get little loot and still less promotion. They go on the stage, when they are in the freshness of their youth, because they have pretty little faces, trim limbs, and a fancy for

jumping about in gay dresses, instead of sweeping, or baking, or washing, or trudging through life as a shopwoman, or as a mill-hand, or as a maid of all work. They have very small talent, they have no education at all; they dislike work, and they like gaudy attire. The modern stage wants hundreds of such; and to it they go. They all are just so much tinder lying all ready for the Devil's flint—we *say* the Devil still, you know, because he is such a convenient synonym for all our vanities and wickednesses, though he went out long ago with the coming in of light wines, long beards, cigars, clubs, croquet, chignons, railways, five-twenties, and other conveniences. The life these girls lead is about as hard as most domestic servants', and they haven't their "washing and board found;" but they like it because they can dress as they choose, and have a chance of bad champagnes and casino flirtations. They're not all immoral, poor children; some few are good enough girls, who keep their families out of their wages. But they are all of the same class; the class that naturally likes noisy fun, and tawdry glitter, and a sight of what they, God help them, call 'Life,' better than they do industry, and quietude, and the drear sameness

of an English workwoman's existence. And now and then, out of their rank, a Lillian Lee or a Laura Pearl rises; and the poor little fools believe that the exception of one in ten thousand is the sure and invariable rule for all. The life is not, maybe, so odious when they are young and pretty; but it can contain no asylum for them as they grow in years and lose in beauty: and then—then one wonders vaguely what on earth can become of them, for they are seen no more, just as idly as one may wonder what becomes of all the lost pins.'

'The pins, they do say,' I returned, 'are always found in the bottoms of sewers in a hard, shapeless mass that they call, I think, "slag." I am afraid that these girls whom you talk of are found at the bottom of the social strata, hardened into evil, or, at the best, into wretchedness.'

'Most likely,' returned Fanfreluche, with asperity; she never liked any one to say a neat thing save herself. 'The stage certainly has nothing to say to them. The stage may want armies of round-faced girls to skip about as mazurka-maidens, or as elves, or as shepherdesses, or as soldiers, but it never wants armies of middle-aged women. I suppose they do go to wretchedness of

some sort—they must. But, then, so, I'm afraid, do whole multitudes of governesses, and housemaids, and shop-women, and cottagers, who never did a naughty thing in all their days, and yet are left to starve on half-a-crown "relief," or drag out their decaying years in workhouses. There are so far too many women!—if two-thirds of all the female children that are born were put in the water-butt, where they put two-thirds of our puppies, the world might be comfortable.'

'If women had more spheres—' I commenced, but she cut my words in two.

'Where did you learn that miserable cant? There are more men than there is work for already; do you suppose you would increase the harmony of the earth by setting women to squabble with them for it as two of our mongrels may quarrel over a bone?'

'But if they were educated?'

'Ah, my dear!' said Fanfreluche, with a grin, 'we are going to educate everybody, they say, so that everybody shall be above doing anything. What a millennium that will be!'

'But where is Nellie?' I persisted.

'She is just now, I believe, at the Palace Theatre,

in the Strand ; a pretty theatre, as you may know, though not to be called fashionable, and the chief home of burlesque and ballet, now that *we* have gone in for Legitimate Art—whatever that may mean : of course, every playwright thinks his own bantlings “ legitimate,” and other people’s plays all bastards ! ’

‘ She is doing the same as ever, then ? ’

‘ Yes. They always stick to the same, till they are shelved altogether. You know she is a spirited little dancer, and has a certain small bright talent of her own, but she will never be anything except Prince Goldenhair or King Charming in a burlesque. She might have all the genius and poetry of a Ristori, nobody would ever see in her anything except a “ jolly little girl ” in a slashed tunic and white satin tights, singing doggrel to a catching air. If you begin with being a job-horse, though you should win the Derby itself, nobody would ever believe that you could have either pace or race in you. Nellie has always done burlesque, and she will have to do burlesque till the end of time. There are such scores of such girls !—well, I suppose it is a good thing ; if everybody would only play Lady Macbeth, where would the theatres be ? ’

‘But the stage is such a hard life anyhow! and without eminence in it—’

‘It is worse than making lace at a profit of a farthing an hour, or sewing fifteen hours for fourpence-halfpenny, or carding cotton in the mills at four-and sixpence a week, or, for a few pence a ton, panning salt in the scorching steam, till their pallid faces are like a sodden sponge?—Well, yes, I think it may be even worse. *We* know that. But how should the girls know it when they are ignorant, and conscious of good looks, and wanting a bit of finery and a fling of dancing; and the floats and the green-room seem almost to them like paradise. The lives of women of the English Poor are so abject, so colourless, so dreary, without any break of joy or any pause of toil, or any gleam of hope, and full of such noise, and stench, and cursing riot, and bloodless apathy, all commingled, that one cannot wonder if they would sometimes exchange such lives even for hell itself!’

And I knew that she said truly; for indeed to live only to know the pains, the needs, the agonies, and the travails that lie in living, is a hard fate, though it be the fate of millions.

‘And where they might be happy and innocent

they will not,' I answered, for my thoughts went back to the little cottage beneath the rosethorn, and to the honest smith's forge amidst the woods, where the woman, who had chosen vice and pillage, might have dwelt in honoured virtue and in homely peace.

Fanfreluche grinned.

'No, my dear—not often—and I suppose it's a very fortunate thing that they don't. If they would, we might perhaps get our salt panned, and our cotton carded, but we certainly shouldn't get our material for scenic effects of fine legs, and of gauzy tunics! I often think when I hear them talking, as it's the way to talk now, of bringing everybody to be so very virtuous, and so very refined, and so very intellectual, and so very divine, where on earth, if they were ever to succeed, would the world go for the human *chiffons* out of whose bodies and souls it manufactures all its amusements? So long as amusement must be had I am sure they cannot afford to ask their common men and women to be virtuous. The *residuum* that they sigh over is what yields them gaieties, as the foul-smelling ditch-mud yields the pretty painted myosotis. A thousand nightingales died to make the Roman epicure's

pâté; tens of thousands of human beings perish in moral death to give to one city—its pleasures.’

And this was all that, for a time, I heard of Nellie.

She was playing at the pretty little Palace theatre, which was of some repute at that moment for burlesques; and now and then I heard two or three men say how awfully jolly little Courcy was in that funny parody of the *Bride of Lammermoor*, or how tremendously well got up she had been, in crimson, and white, and gold, as the King of the Golden River, in the pantomime that had been based upon that story, at the Palace, at Christmas. She was leading the old life, no doubt, learning doggrel, singing rubbish, dancing horn-pipes and jigs, delighting the gallery with appropriate ‘gag,’ quarrelling in the green-room, supping noisily over kidneys and ‘fizz,’ trudging home afoot in the grey break of the dawn, or jolting wearily over the stones in an omnibus, with its glandered dying horses; her appointed portion hard work and coarse pleasure.

No other life was possible to her, once having enlisted herself in this.

She was one of the ‘rank and file;’ one of those

innumerable who, *tambour battant*, serve to make up a spectacle. The conscription of Fate had drawn her to be one of the toy-soldiers of King Joujou, who has a terrible knack of killing his soldiers himself sometimes. So long as she could wear her little gilded uniform jauntily and well King Joujou paid her wage, and she held a place on his great parade-ground of public amusement; if she were ever to faint or to fall it would not matter—there were plenty as pretty and as alert as she to catch her little pennant as it dropped, and fill her place in that great army wherewith King Joujou plays the mimic war of Pleasure.

She was no genius, she was no beauty, she was only a little, blue-eyed, sturdy-limbed girl of the populace, with the *beauté du diable* in her cheeks, and her curls, and the freshness of youth in her voice that gave something of charm and of melody even to those vile slang inanities that she was appointed to sing. There were scores like her; what happened to her mattered to no one. She came to a workhouse at her birth: she would go to a workhouse for her grave. To the world this seemed excellently fitting; an arrangement proper, and quite harmonious.

And meanwhile—was it not much that a young creature, born of a pauper, and reared by the parish, should know the feel of silks and satins if only in her stage dresses, and should know the taste of champagnes if only made of gooseberries? On the whole, when you consider that a pauper child is an animal absolutely undesired by any one; very much lower than a pig, which can at least be sold so much per stone; and possessing nothing on the face of the earth except its hunger and its heartaches; it may be conceded that Nellie had done very well for herself when she had got leave to dance about in bright colours for some half-dozen years, and then could go leisurely to either death or perdition quite at her own choice and fancy. Several millions, you know, have to die in rags, and infancy—whether they may like it or not.

One day I got out ‘on the loose,’ as your slang phrases it; a reprehensible practice, no doubt, but one dear to dogs as to men, for better is a bare bone in the gutter, with the sweetness of free-will, than are fatted meats eaten within the curb and the gall of a chain.

My little wanderings were innocent enough in

those streets and gardens of artistic South Kensington which stretched around the pretty villa where we dwelt. I was about to return of my own accord homeward, when I saw a girl walking down one of the small and narrow lanes that do so curiously intersect even your proudest lines of palaces.

There was something in the lithe step, the clusters of auburn hair, and the supple yet sturdy figure that I knew; I felt sure that they were Nellie's, and, quick as thought, I darted after her. I could not reach her to attract her notice before she turned in at the doorway of one of the small, poor houses of the place, but I was near enough to follow her in unseen, and mount the stairs up which she had disappeared.

There were three flights of these; and on the landing of the third a door stood a trifle open: my instinct told me that she had passed through it, and I squeezed myself through its inch-wide opening, and entered the chamber.

It was a poor, meagre, little room; very dull, very mean; looking upon leaden tiles and red chimneys, and gray gusts of sulphurous smoke. There were the mansions of the nobles and the traders, the villas of the fashionable actresses, the artistic homes

of the successful painters, all around in the sweet, cool, living sunshine, with the greenness of budding trees about them, and the colours of art and of luxury within them. But this little room, with no look-out save on those endless roofs and those drear columns of smoke, was almost as cheerless and as wretched as though it had been in the haunts of Whitechapel ; whilst through its one narrow window there only came upon the wind the scent of frying meats, the stench of decaying vegetables, the screams of children, and the throbbing of a steam-hammer at its never-ending work.

There was a little linen-curtained bed standing in one corner ; and on it was stretched a girl, dying, it was easy to see, of fever. She was very young, and though her face was now so drawn and scarlet, it also was easy to see that but a very little time before it must have been a pretty, brown, baby face, with a little cherry-like mouth, and robin-like eyes ; such a face as would have been the pride of ‘ mother ’ and of ‘ teacher ’ in some cottage home and village choir.

She also, doubtless, had been one of the toy-troopers of King Joujou. He sweeps into his conscription all whom he can find from far and

wide, over all his kingdom ; from the shepherd's hut on the moorlands, as from the crowded lanes and gullies of the city ; from the little, humble, ivy-hidden village on the hills, as from the vast wards of the poorhouse and the factory. And those he once has gained can never leave his service ; until he breaks them in his gay caprice, or leaves them perishing by the wayside.

She was lying quite still and straight ; with her brown eyes wide open, burning, and without sense in them : her cloud of dusky curls had been shorn short ; her lips were parted with quick, painful, gasping breaths. She was muttering vague, broken words about father, and harvest, and going glean- ing, and going blackberrying ; her thoughts, no doubt, with some peasant life that she had led in childhood in the green level lands of the corn countries, or under the shelter of the oak woods of the west.

The other girl, auburn-haired and blue-eyed, who I saw was indeed the little 'Wood-Elf,' had dropped beside the couch, and was murmuring gentle words to her, and hushing her tenderly, and holding to her some fresh, cool, orange-scented drink.

The fever-stricken child drank eagerly; but she had no knowledge or consciousness in her regard, and when she had drained the draught she lay still and straight again, muttering huskily of the blackberries that were ripe in the lower wood, and that they would be late for school if they stayed to gather them.

On such a scene I did not dare to break; and yet I had not the heart to leave; so I crouched down in the shadow behind the door, and waited.

An aged woman came slowly in; a gaunt, shrivelled, cruel-eyed hag.

‘It arn’t no good fussing about her,’ the old woman muttered in a low voice. ‘The doctor say as how she can’t live another day. And you’re wellnigh wored out.’

Nellie shook her head silently.

‘This day do begin a new week,’ muttered the old creature hoarsely. ‘I thought as how she’d have gone off quiet by now. Do you stand another week’s rent—eh? She han’t got a shilling, you know.’

Nellie, in silence still, opened a little purse, and counted into the woman’s wrinkled palm sixteen shillings. It was a shabby, little, mean chamber;

but rent, like all other things, is so dear—to the poor.

‘You won’t ever sit up this night again?’ pursued the old dame, doubtless softened by the thrice blessed music of silver pieces. ‘You’ve sat up nine nights already. You’ll kill yourself—and with all your work at the theayter, too, as well.’

‘I shan’t be harmed,’ said Nellie, briefly, and turned herself away, and again sat down beside the bed. And there she remained for more than two hours, whilst without, in the soft, bright, cool spring afternoon the tender leaf-buds quivered in the sunlight; and the carriages swept in hundreds through the streets; and the fashionable crowds flocked to saunter through the palm-houses, and to listen to music, and to laugh, and to flirt, and to make their pleasant appointments, and to draw their magnificent dresses slowly over the lawns, at the first azalea show of the year.

It is the sharpness of its contrasts that lends all its poetry, its vigour, its ambition, and its colour to your life; but sometimes—they are bitter.

Nellie sat motionless beside the bed, with the light from the casement coming in upon her; in it I saw that she was much altered.

The round cheeks, the smooth forehead, the ruddy mouth, had all hardened, and got a curious, worn, coarse, pained look. The soft skin and the bright colours of a woman cannot stand long the rouge, and the white paint, and the steaming gas, and the late hours of the theatrical life of a burlesque-dancer. They will 'make up' just as well as ever by night; but by day—they make your heart ache, as does a fresh rose lying soiled and stamped in the mud of the streets.

And yet despite this rack and wear of time there was a sweeter look in her eyes than of yore, a sadder, steadier, and purer look, as of one who had suffered, and not vainly.

When the dying girl in the little white bed tossed and moaned Nellie touched her gently, moved her carefully, and murmured to her a few soothing words, which, though they could not reach the dulled and wandering brain, seemed yet to bear with them some balm and hush. She was a little wicked thing, of course; accursed of all good souls; gaining her livelihood by ministering to the base senses of coarse sight-seers; purchasing her daily bread by moral degradation, and in a sensual spectacle:—and yet she came hither to soothe the last

dread hours of a creature poorer and lonelier even than herself; and when her heart throbbed, and her eyes smarted, and her limbs ached, after the work and the noise of her theatrical labour, she had sat, night after night, sleepless, worn out, weary unutterably, only just for the mere sake that a fever-stricken girl should feel a friend's hand near when it sought one in its death-struggle.

Another hour went by : there was no change in the suffering she watched.

Sometimes the girl lay quite quiet, sunk in apathy, breathing hardly ; at others she tossed, and moaned, and cried out in pitiful ways of all the remembered things of some lost country home—of pastured cattle ; of running waters ; of the hymn that should be learned for Sunday ; of the bilberries that were ripening in the old birchwood on the moor ; of the verses that mother had given her to learn by rote in punishment for saying that she wished she were a lady.

In all the sorrowful, wistful, shattered words, it was so plain to see the story that went with that little, brown, winsome face ; the story of the rebellious petulance, and fretful impatience, and vague discontent, which had brought the cotter's prettiest

sunniest child from moor and meadow, from burn and byre, from the old safe ways, and the old healthful labour, and the old summer gladness by hill and dale, and the old fireside nook by 'mother's' side, to perish here of fever, and alone, amidst the noise, and smoke, and stench, and misery that are the birth-chime and the death-knell of the poor in cities.

'She had wished to be a lady,'—and she died here.

Poor little pretty sunburnt face, once bright as a brown brook and ruddy as a berry of the yew!

Doubtless in that little cottage, wheresoever it stood, far away amidst grey hills, and soft mists, and sunny birchen woods, and calm green pastures, there was one name that was never spoken; one chair that was never drawn to the noonday meal; one voice, like a robin's, that the father missed from the girls' choir at the church; one kiss, given in smiles and tears, that the mother felt only in her dreams, when sleep came to her beneath the old thatched roof.

Yet another hour passed; the slow dull chimes of some distant clock swung six strokes through the air. Nellie started, rose, looked wistfully at the little bed, then stooped, and touched with her lips

the child's flushed, knitted, aching brow. The girl moved wearily under the touch ; her dark eyes still wide open, still without light or sense in them.

'Mother—mother,' she murmured, 'don't be angry. I did not mean to stay away from school. It was me, not Susie, did it. The wood was so pleasant this mornin', and the birds was singing so sweet, and the vi'lets was so many, I forgot—I quite forgot!'

And in answer there only came the dull fall of the steam hammer ; the dull breath of the poisoned wind.

Nellie turned slowly away, and passed from the chamber, and down the steep flights of the stairs. Far below she met the old woman to whom she had given the money.

'Do look at her ; pray do look at her !' she entreated. 'I will come the moment the play is over.'

The old woman muttered assent.

'But where's the good on't ?' she asked ; ''tis waste of time. The girl's a dead 'un, a dead 'un.'

Nellie went in silence out into the street. I followed her, and fawned on her.

She looked down, and started violently, as though she recognized me ; with a quick glance at

the name upon my collar, she raised me in her arms. Then, silently still, she went as rapidly as she could through the various ways that led to the gardens of Gladys' residence. Before the walls a groom was riding his own horse, and leading up and down a beautiful black mare, in which I recognized a favourite of Beltran's, by name Eblis.

As we drew near the gate it opened, and Beltran himself came out from it.

I felt her heart beat thickly against mine. She trembled, and would have fled, but he had seen and already approached her in the quiet road, under the shadow of the trees overtopping the wall. He thanked her for seeing to my safety.

'Not for the first time, either,' he added. 'It is the same dog you used to know. You are coming in here, are you not?'

Her voice shook as she answered him, 'No.'

'And why not?' he asked. 'Gladys so continually regrets the way you shun her; you are always absent when she tries to see you, and you will never come here, or accept anything at our hands. Why do you do it, Nellie?'

'It's best, my lord,' she said curtly.

'I am at a loss why you say so. She feels

herself driven into a sort of ingratitude that is most abhorrent to her. Indeed, you give her great pain.'

Nellie said nothing.

'Come in now,' he urged. 'She is alone; she will be rejoiced to see you.'

'No—thank you, no, sir,' she answered him. 'Please let me go!'

'This is sheer obstinacy, Nellie. You rendered her too great a debt for her ever to forget, or wish to forget, it. You should not make her look, or feel, so negligent of it.'

'She's neither, my lord. But—but—I'm not fit for the likes of her. There's harm enough said of her without me adding to it.'

His face flushed a little: it was he, now, who made no answer.

'Tell her—tell her,' murmured Nellie, 'that it's because I love her that I won't come anigh her; and tell her, sir, that I know her sweet, generous, tender nature a deal too well as ever to think she'd forget me—quite. Let me go—please let me go.'

'Why, Nellie, what is the matter? You are crying?'

'Am I, sir? It's only—I've just come from little Annie Dell as is a dying—she's a dancer, like

me, they calls her on the play-bills Clarice Vaughan. It's fever; and she's only been a year on the boards; and she's a little soft thing like a kitten—it seem sad.'

'Fever? Can I do nothing? There are many things she must want. Do let me help you—'

'She'll want nought no more, sir, when this night's overpassed,' said Nellie very softly. 'But you're very good—very. You've had a deal of goodness, my lord, again and again, to poor girls as was in want or woe, and all you've ever got back for it is a bad name.'

Then she turned and rushed swiftly down the street, as though ashamed of her temerity, or fearful of his questions.

Beltran stood still and looked after her.

'A bad name! A bad name!' he muttered. 'What does it matter for me? But for this glorious creature—when my lips have never even touched hers!'

Then he flung himself into saddle and rode away with Eblis.



CHAPTER IX.

APRIL FLOWERS.

THERE was rather a good thing happened last night,' said Fanfreluche to me a few evenings later in the supper-room of the Coronet, where Gladys had been playing in that favourite part of hers, the *Beatrice*, in which she had first challenged and won the suffrages of the London public.

Fanfreluche was accustomed to spend her nights out at pleasure; her present owner never heeded what she did nor where she went; she had established herself in his chambers unasked and undesired; and she had liberty to do just as she pleased—to go to perdition if she preferred.

Sometimes I think that this is one of the most exquisite enjoyments man or dog can have : no doubt we ought to be very grateful to those who will drag us to our good with collar and chain, but the process is apt to get excessively irksome to us ; and I doubt very much if the poor suicides amongst you, who are hoisted out half-drowned from the mud of the Thames or the stench of the Seine, when they see all their trouble gone through for nothing, feel very grateful to the grappling-irons and the hot bricks that call them back nilly-willy to the woe and weariness of life.

‘ There was rather a good thing last night,’ she pursued. ‘ We dined at Richmond : only men : a dinner that Claud Lucy gave to some members of the Circle des Patineurs.

‘ The men were all right, except one, and he was an underbred one—Abney Arcott. I don’t think you know him. He’s only been heard of the last year. He made a big fortune in agencies and things abroad ; and by money, and luck, and flunkeyism, and a gorgeous place in the Forest, with a first-rate cook in it, he has got pushed amongst some of our “*beaux messieurs dorés*.” Only we don’t take him amongst our own women ; and always

backball him carefully all the way down St James's Street, from the Bow Window to the Thatched House ; and only treat his Forest place like a very good inn, where the host don't present you a bill. Lucan Phipps brought him out ; and Lucan generally trains pretty decently. Even he can't polish this fellow, quite ; but as Arcott always seems to get awed when he's amongst his betters, he has never made a real blunder before. Florance Fane used to give him awful facers last season ; and it's always seemed to put him into tolerably fair form.

'I remember when they went first to dine at his place,—Flo and seven other men of the Brigades,—old Flo, as they went into the dining-room, stared hard through his eye-glass at the dinner-table, and at the ninth place at the top, to which Abney Arcott was moving.

'“I think you mistook us—quite,” said Flo, in his quietest and most amiable tones ; “we said we'd dine *here* ; we never said we'd dine with *you* !”

'Well—last night Arcott was more loquacious than common. Somebody said he was *tête monté*, because the Duchess of Astolat had actually sent him a card : somebody else said it was because he was out without his trainer ; Lucan being over in

Paris. Whichever it was, he let his tongue run far more than usual. On his off side sat Lord Cissister—you may know the man; stout, florid, with a ruddy beard, and a shady name on the turf; looks a bully, and is one when he “feels a winner!” Beltran, whom he happens to hate, because our friend thrashed him at Eton some twenty-five years ago, and has been down upon him on every possible occasion ever since, sat on the other side of the table, some way nearer to Lucy.

‘Around Cissister they got talking of theatres and such like; and of all themes in this world Arcott must needs harp upon Gladys Gerant. He talked a great deal of her; and all more or less in an offensive fashion.

‘Beltran did not miss a syllable; but he went on with his dinner and his own conversation as if he heard nothing. Presently the millionaire grew coarser, and said one or two things the meaning of which there can be no mistaking, and which can only be said of women of the lightest name and lowest life; and he ended with a sneer at her continual absence from places and pastimes that “her sort” were only too glad to be invited to enjoy.

“Quite right, Mr Arcott, quite right!” called

out Cississter in his loudest tones. "It's the damndest affectation. She's as wild as any of 'em. But she's chosen to run dark in that form, you know—they often do when they're young uns. It's the commonest stable trick."

'Then, and only then, Beltran looked up, and without his face changing a muscle, glanced across the table, and "fixed" both the men with eyes which can be very hard and cruel when he chooses.

"I'm glad *you've* come within range, Cississter," he said very slowly and distinctly. "One can't spoil powder on vermin. I suppose you don't in the least know what you are talking about. I do. The lady you speak of is quite as good as your mother; and a very great deal better than your wife."

'Can't you fancy the dead silence that fell over the gay and boisterous talk?

'It was straight hard hitting, a little more in the rough and ready style, and less subtle than his reprisals usually are, but he knew his foes, and it was the most effective he could possibly have used with them. It fell with the force of a sledgehammer. Lady Cississter is the wildest and worst of her order.

‘What happened after? Nothing ever happens after in those days. There was a tumultuous, tempestuous scene for a few moments; but Beltran calmly ignored the wrangle, and only addressed himself to his host.

‘“I’ll bid you good-night, Lucy,” said he. “I don’t want you to be bored with a row. Your friends know where to find me—if they want.”

‘But the sympathies of the table were with him; the common feeling was that he had been only *dans son droit*. Of course they all believed that he had lied; but it was the sort of lie which gentlemen like from a gentleman’s mouth, and which becomes him well always.

‘The upshot of it was that he did not leave the dinner, but Cississter and Arcott did. That is Beltran’s way of dealing with people who rouse him. But whether he cares for the woman he defended is quite another matter—he would take the part of an ugly old apple-seller if he were in the mood, and thought the odds strong against her.’

As she concluded her narrative Beltran and Denzil sauntered in; they had just come into the house, it appeared, from a dinner with Her Grace of Astolat.

They were speaking of this very occurrence of the previous night.

‘It was hitting with the gloves off, Vere,’ said Denzil, as he cast himself into a chair. ‘It wasn’t quite so polished as your usual style.’

‘I never put the gloves on with men like those,’ said Beltran, going up to the mantelpiece to light a cigar. ‘Pummel them as you may they don’t feel, that’s the worst of it.’

‘I should think they do feel—rather—with the story running wild this morning about the clubs and drawing-rooms.’

‘I’m afraid Bully Cississter don’t. Do you remember my thrashing him at Eton for stealing little Holyrood’s champagnes?’

‘He felt that—he was black and blue for a month. Have you heard anything from him?’

‘Not a word.’

‘I don’t suppose you will. It would be too ridiculous for him to meet you on the sands by Ostend about his wife—of all people in the world!’

Beltran laughed.

‘Oh, I don’t know. As long as your wife is your wife, I suppose she’s *casus belli* enough for anything.’

‘ All the men were with you ; feeling ran very strong about it—’

‘ What’s the good ? Do you suppose any one of them thinks one whit better of the child ? ’

‘ I don’t know that they do—’

‘ You know that they don’t ! ’

‘ I fear that they don’t, certainly. That is one of the peculiar successes of modern society—that there is no means whereby a man can declare the innocence and honour of a woman that shall not at once stigmatize her with darker slanders than ever touched her before.’

‘ Yes. Now and then, though we know that, we are weak enough to let a cur get a rise out of us ; but we are safe to repent it,—or ought to do for the woman’s sake.’

Then he began to talk of other matters, hearing a step that he knew without, and a moment later there entered the only person in all the town who had heard nothing of the scene at Claud Lucy’s dinner.

Of course she had not heard of it ; would never hear of it : you never do hear of any one of the million ways in which your world ruins, ridicules, marries, divorces, attaints, decides for you, pro-

phies of you, and even murders you—in your absence.

I asked Fanfreluche, that night, if Denzil had altogether forgotten his lost love, whereat she grinned.

‘I don’t know, my dear. Men do forget in seven days sometimes, and sometimes they don’t in seven years. It just depends. They remind me of Clyde Paulett, when they were woodcock-shooting in the west of Ireland last year. They had very fine sport all the week; but Paulett was not in his usual spirits. No bags that he made seemed to give him much pleasure; and though when they totted up the whole he was found to have shot more than any other, he appeared to care little. They asked him what on earth was the matter with him: was it women or Jews, a plant on the turf or a bad vein at *écarté*? “Well,” he said, slowly and sadly, “to tell you the truth, I can’t forget that one grand old cock that I blazed away at, like a duffer, and didn’t bowl over. I *have* felt such a fool!” Now you know, I think it’s very much with their loves as it is with their sport. However many head of game may lie slain at their feet, they can’t forget what they “*blaze at and don’t bowl over.*”’

A brief while later, in the balmy spring weather, we had a little river party ; surely the pleasantest of all sunlit pastimes. Because Gladys was in a manner excluded from most pleasures by her rejection of one world, and by the other world's rejection of her, her friend did all in his power that she should feel her loss as little as possible. Happily for her she was of a temper to which the meditative and intellectual pleasures of thought and of art were far more suited than the noisier and more frivolous diversions of society.

But yet there were in her the natural impulses of youth towards gladness and gaiety which, although bruised by the sorrows of her brief life, had not been wholly broken. And these he always sought to meet, and to indulge, as far as it was possible to do so without exposing her to that companionship from which he had always warded her.

The boating party usually consisted of two four-oars, of which the crews were chosen from his own chief friends. They used to take to the river some half-dozen miles out of town ; scull leisurely down to some pretty wooded resting-place, to which servants had been sent earlier with choice meats and light wines ; lunch there ; laugh and smoke ; paddle

a little about amongst the tall reeds and the floating forget-me-nots ; and so row back to London in time for twilight and for dinner. There were few pleasanter days of simpler, or mere careless, open-air amusement than these river-days of Beltran's ; and it was held as an eagerly coveted distinction to be one of those invited by him to take a place in his boats. It was well known that, though a man not commonly scrupulous in such matters, he was excessively scrupulous as to whom he introduced to association with Gladys.

Men held their own opinions, doubtless, as to his relations with her ; but they saw that he chose to treat her with perfect deference, and they had to follow his lead. Two or three of them even, I think, credited the truth, and believed in her innocence almost as thoroughly as he did who knew it.

You, indeed, are very curious in this. In your clubs and your camps, in your mischievous moods and your philosophic moods, always indeed theoretically, you consider all women immoral (except just, of course, your own mothers), but practically, when your good feeling is awakened, or your honest faith honestly appealed to, you will believe in a woman's honour with a heartiness and strength for

which she will look in vain in her own sex. According to your jests the world is one vast harem, of which all the doors are open to every man, and whose fair inmates are all alike impressionable to the charm of intrigue or to the chink of gold. But, in simple earnest and reality, I have heard the wildest and most *debonnair* amongst you—once convinced of the honour and innocence looking from a woman's eyes—stand up in defence of these when libelled in her absence, with a zeal and a staunchness that did my heart good.

The boats this day went Henley way, and the pause was above Wargrave.

The river was a sheet of dusky sunlight; the meadows and banks were all golden with kingcups and daffodils; the hawthorn buds were blooming on the great coiled, swinging branches; the leafage was in all its sweetest and freshest green, and here and there a little water-bird was darting amongst the tall bullrushes and the green river-plants.

Under the skilled sinewy hands of men who, in their time, had won their honours on the Isis, the boats went as the rowers would,—now skimming as fast as a swallow, now loitering like a slow-winged eider-duck,—past the green, level, daisied fields,

and the lofty walls of woodland, and the dark gateways of the locks, and the sunny reaches where the cattle stood, and the tufts of reeds and sedges that hid the soft blue of the forget-me-nots.

They landed, and lunched, and lingered over the fruit and the ice and the wine, under the blossoming hawthorns and the great boughs of the chestnuts; and then strolled hither and thither, pulling down the plume-like hawthorn for a standard for her boat, and gathering the primroses by thousands to fill her hands; carelessly enjoying such simple country things, and wandering, these men of the world, as though they were shepherds in a pastoral,—save for the cigars that were for ever in their mouths, and for the worldly gossipry that they laughed over with one another.

With the freshness of the springtide, with the sunshine of the waters, with the cool odours of herbage and foliage, with the light easy laughter, with the gay friendly converse; how charming they were—those river hours! And for one, at least, amongst them, over the broad bright Thames, and over the fields of flower-sown grasses, there shone the ‘light that never yet was upon land or sea,’—save in the eyes of a woman, when she lives in the

first full sweet faith, the dreaming idolatrous ideals, of a love half known, half answered, yet still in all the deep untroubled peace of its birth-slumbers.

When the sun was slanting to the west the boats were sought for the return. Whilst they went for them Gladys remained where she had sat some time, couched in the curving roots of a great beech, whilst at her feet the water flowed amongst the rushes, and the great green lily leaves spread out their splendour, though flowerless as yet.

She had been very still awhile, and Denzil also, who remained with her, had not spoken.

She was often very grave, when the stillness of the country was around her. I fancy that her thoughts were with the years when the boy Harold had been a child beside her, in the old, cool, moss-grown paths of orchards, and in the tangled ways of nut-tree coppices, binding the cowslips and the primroses and the daffodils with withes of ivy, and dreaming of the imperishable things he should achieve when manhood came.

After awhile she raised her eyes from the water and looked at Denzil. He had thrown himself on his side on the grass, and his face, in the shade of the trees, was dark, stern, sad exceedingly.

‘Where are your thoughts?’ she asked him.

Beltran’s best beloved friend seemed to her almost as a brother.

Her voice found its way to the closed recesses of his memory, and he answered her simply and truly : — ‘Of a woman I loved.’

Her eyes rested on him with their serious, meditative sweetness.

‘Tell me of her,’ was all she said.

‘I never speak of her.’

‘Never? She is dead then?’

‘Not that I know; she is dead to me. That is enough, you see.’

‘Who was she? What was she?’

‘She was an actress like you. You may hear them recall her now and then when they speak, as they speak still sometimes, of Gertrude d’Eyncourt.’

She raised herself on one arm; her eyes lighted and charged.

‘Ah! I know!—that beautiful woman whose portrait he has shown me,—so heroic a face, so full of thought, of patience, of courage. But she was some one’s wife, surely? She was married?’

‘Ah, child! do not speak as if *you* had caught the world’s cant. Yes: she was married—to a

beast who only prized her proud beauty, and her bright graces, and her glorious gifts, as so many tools, that were to bring gold to himself. There are men, you know, to whom their wife's honour is like their own—only a chattel to be sold when they can! She loved me, and knew that I loved her. I had urged her to leave her husband for me with all the eloquence I knew. I don't deny that. I was justified. Although he hated me, because I treated him like the cur he was, he was ready enough to sacrifice her to any one of the richer *roués* who would have purchased her of him just as one may purchase some beautiful wild hawk of a brutal keeper. But I ought not to speak to you of these things—'

'Go on,' she said quietly; her great eyes were glowing where she sat in the shadow of the boughs, and her lips were parted.

'She loved me. It cannot hurt her to say it—now. And, indeed, she could not have loved me much, or she never had done what she did. For, one night in the height of that London season—seven seasons ago—she disappeared. Not a living soul knew whither she went. The town supposed I had taken her, but it was not so; I knew no more

than the rest of them why nor where she was gone. I had left her that night in her own drawing-room, after the theatre was over. There had been other people present. I had been unable to see her alone, and I relied on seeing her, as usual, with the morrow. I recollect that she came out on to the balcony, and stood there looking after me as I went down the street. There was an awning over the balcony, for it was warm weather; the moonlight was strong and bright; she wore black, that drifted about her like a cloud, and she had a great, gorgeous Brazilian lily that I had given her, in her bosom. God! What fools men are to remember the veriest trifles that once belonged to women who never cared for them!’

‘Did she not care? You said she loved you.’

‘Could she love me? Not as I count love. With the morning there came one of her letters to me; she often wrote to me and I to her, though we met twice every day; in it she told me that she had left the stage and the world for ever; that her husband had given her no choice betwixt flight and a lucrative dishonour; that she refused my love not less than she refused this abhorred passion that was pressed on her; and that she implored me not

to seek to pursue, or to discover her. That was all. Am I not right to say she never loved me? Of course I did not obey her. I set all possible modes of inquiry at work. First, I went straight to their house and thrashed *him* till he was left half dead; then I began my search for her. It was utterly useless; it has been so ever since.'

'She could not go to any evil?'

'Evil? No! Evil was not possible to her. She was the truest and the proudest woman that ever lived. Why she went I know no more than the dead; but I would stake my life on the purity, on the nobility, of her reasons, however exaggerated they may have been.'

'And have you never found her?'

'Never. Once I heard of her accidentally; if the man who spoke were right, she was living then—in penury and wretchedness. I have tried every means, but all have failed. It doesn't matter, I suppose; they say that these things don't, —greatly. Only, you see, I cannot forget her; and I cannot find heart in me to give to any other woman; and I talk to you, child, and look on you, not stirred one whit by your beauty; knowing you are fair indeed, but caring no more

for that than an old worn dotard of ninety. Do you know that I would give my soul to love, and I cannot; just because this one lost woman will never release me?’

There were the fierce vibrations of an intense passion and sorrow under the half-quiet, half-reckless words; and his face was very dark where the shadows of the spring-born leaves drifted over it.

I cannot tell why, but I thought of the woman who had died in the bitterness of the winter time, in the poverty and the misery of Paris.

Through the silence there came at that moment the soft sound of moving oars and of rippling waters; amongst the twilight of the boughs a boat, with plumes of young green branches at its bow, glided gently to the little landing-place.

‘Where are you, Derry?’ asked Beltran’s voice. ‘That duffer Ned has given over—says he can’t pull back to town. Must get across and catch the express. He declares it’s a sprain; I believe it’s nothing but laziness and champagne. Take his oar, will you? They can have a waterman with your set.’

‘All right,’ responded Denzil, as he assisted Gladys into the boat amongst all the big bullrushes,

and the broad water-docks, and the pretty, feathered, rosy-hued river reeds; and taking his coat off, seated himself on the bench that Guilliadene had vacated.

As he pulled us back to town in the stilly balmy evening, with his handsome head bare in the moonlight, and his grip giving true as ever the old marvellous Oxford stroke, he laughed as pleasantly and as often as any. It was Gladys whose eyes were dreamy, and whose face was troubled, as she sat under her fragrant banner of the hawthorn boughs, with a dark cloak drawn about her, and the field flowers that her friends had gathered for her dying in the coming of the night.

That night her acting lacked somewhat of its force, and had a languor and a lifelessness in it that were new to her.

As soon as her own share in the play was over she went to her home; Beltran was not in the theatre that night, and when he was absent she never received there.

She sat very silent, very thoughtful, before the fire that still burned in her pretty drawing-room, for the evenings were chilly, though the days were warm. Bright and full of rich hues though

the chamber was, it seemed very still and solitary after the blaze and buzz of the crowded theatre.

Vaguely, perhaps, she felt how great this loneliness was in which she lived, at years when other women have all the light of home about them, all the tenderness of their mothers, all the gay companionships of their girlhood. It seldom weighed on her, because her life was brilliant and full of pleasures of its own kind; but to-night she seemed to feel how utterly alone in truth she was.

Her eyes were dim and full of languor as she looked at the delicate tender primroses of the woods and meadows, where they had been placed in an old costly vase of Venice glass.

‘Whom did *he* ever love?’ she murmured, with her lips against my forehead. ‘Did he love *like* that? So that he never again can forget?’

Denzil’s words had stirred her heart from its rest; but it was for another, not for himself, that it awoke, troubled and still but half-conscious.



CHAPTER X.

‘ VICTRIX.’

‘ ELL, my dear !’ said Fanfreluche, frantically rushing to me next day with breathless excitement and her most diabolical grin. ‘ We have done pretty well, haven’t we ? Marchioness of Isla ! Marchioness of Isla ! When we began life, as *you* say, with bare feet, and home-spun skirts, and potatoes for dinner, in the Peak ; and, as *I* know, with a shilling a week, and penny gaffs, and a glass of gin for a treat at High-bury Barn.’

‘ What on earth can you mean ? ’ I asked in some fear, thinking indeed that she had lost her senses.

‘ I mean what I say,’ she snapped angrily. ‘ Marchioness of Isla ! It is pretty well for a woman who began life by selling *you* in a market-place. Pooh, child, don’t look so scared. Your friend of the Derbyshire wakes has won the great marriage-prize of the year. True ; certainly it is true. The town is talking of nothing else. Avice Dare—Laura Pearl—Cléopâtre—what does it matter what one is called so long as one ends as Marchioness of Isla ? What do I mean ? Oh, you little fool ! I mean this—Malcolm Kenneth, 16th Marquis of Isla, comes of age this winter ; he has had a long minority ; he has been educated by a foolish mother and a rigid Calvinist ; he has seen no more of life than a young nun ; he is a stubborn, simple-minded, frank, foolish boy ; the first thing he does on becoming his own master, is to go to Paris. Paris, in all the wonder of her exquisite spring season, for a lad who had only seen and known grim Scotch castles and sour Scotch matrons ! The first night he went to the opera : there, in her box, blazing in the splendour of her beauty, and the living light of her sapphires, surrounded with princes and gentlemen, he saw—“ Cléopâtre.” From that moment the world only held for the boy that one woman. She

had the wit and the ambition to see that here was a greater prize than mere pillage. The boy was mad with his first delirium: she could do as she chose with him. She chose to marry him. She has done so. The marriage is valid; no efforts of his family will dissolve it; and the woman whom you once knew as the "light o' love" of the lad at the mill in the Peak, is now a Peeress of England and Scotland, Marchioness of Isla, and Countess of Allanmore! That is to-day's news. Ah, my dear! I told you right that all the comedies of the playwrights, and all the romances of the fictionists, are not one tithe so amusing, nor one thousandth part so startling, as are the comedies and the romances that meet one at every turn in Life!'

Fanfreluche had in nothing exaggerated. To this amazing altitude had the betrayer of Reuben Dare arisen.

One sunny noon in that pleasant glad season when the leaves are as fresh as the toilettes, and the laughs are as light as the showers, I sprang down from the little carriage and roved to and fro, whilst the men passing by clustered round Gladys.

I roamed at leisure, viewing that scene, always familiar yet never hackneyed, because, on its wide

stage the three imperious *impresarie*, Gold, and Ruin, and Death, never permit the same drama to rest nor the same players to tarry; but bring ever fresh names and fresh faces, if the old farces and tragedies still will re-act themselves under new titles.

The place was full; and all its crowd turned by one accord to gaze at a carriage which drove slowly down the road, as though to challenge that universal observation from that fashionable mob. It was an equipage fitter, with its outriders, its postillions, its superb liveries, its fracas, its display, for a ducal procession on the Heath or the Town Moor, than for a simple noon drive in Hyde Park.

Its occupants were a fair lad, with a stupid, feeble, ruddy face, and a woman of splendid beauty, enveloped in black guipures and black sables, for the last of which a chill in the air gave excuse.

‘There go the biggest fool and the blackest witch in Christendom,’ muttered old Lord Shamrock. ‘Good God! If Ronald Isla had foreseen it, sir, he’d have strangled this lad—strangled him in his cradle!’

‘Boy looks like an Ayrshire gilly,’ said Lord Guilliadene, to whom he had spoken. ‘Fearfully bad form: never saw worse.’

‘Malcolm Isla, his father, married a shepherd’s daughter, off his own hills,’ growled Lord Brune. ‘Crosses always come out.’

‘But his grandfather, poor Ronald, was a gentleman all over,’ said Lord Shamrock, ‘though an awful fool, to be sure. Do you know how he died?’

‘No!’ the Earl responded with a yawn.

‘He was shot in a duel,’ answered old Lord Shamrock. ‘Shot dead, outside Bruges. I was his second. “It was all a mistake,” he gasped as I caught him. “But I couldn’t have explained unless I’d shown up a woman!” So he died, saying nothing. And that’s the man whose grandson has made a wife and a peecress of—’

The language wherewith he designated her I dare not record for a polite age that blushes at Shakspeare and smiles at Schneider.

‘I suppose she came over to make a dash here out of bravado,’ murmured Denzil, with a glance back towards Beltran. ‘The marriage only took place the other day. She will do just as she chooses with that wretched boy, no doubt.’

‘Isla House in Belgrave Square is being re-decorated,’ said one of the loungers. ‘She is very

stupid not to keep abroad: she will always be “pilled ” here.’

‘ She will get the society she cares for,’ said Denzil. ‘ All the men on the town will go and see her ; and she will have a whole *cohue* of parasites—clergymen among them, if she like to become a “patroness” of churches and hospitals, and I dare say, in time, even a Bishop will dine with her.’

‘ And I will bet you what you like,’ interrupted Guilliadene, ‘ that she will hold huge gatherings at Blair-Isla, and have festivities that will make all Scotland stare.’

‘ If she don’t give Isla’s people a chance for a divorce,’ put in Lord Shamrock. ‘ They will catch at a straw. I should not wonder if she were divorced by the autumn and married afresh by next Easter.’

‘ Nor should I. She’s awfully handsome,’ said Claud Lucy, ‘ and awfully clever. She got de Ferras, and Bernaldés, and Prince Egon of Wallachia killed, and Lord knows how many she’s ruined.’

‘ Clever ! She’s the most stupid and most illiterate creature that ever breathed,’ said Denzil contemptuously. ‘ She never said a decently sensible thing in all her days.’

‘But she never did one not sensible,’ said Lord Brune quietly. ‘All her victims were solvent; she never forsook a man till she had plundered him as far as she could; she returned all small presents as “insults;” she never got any one killed unless he were useless and troublesome; and she finally has married this lad. Oh, a clever woman, certainly; I do not believe she will be divorced. I believe she will now train for the Morality Stakes. They generally do when they have won a Gold Cup.’

I overheard these remarks; my mistress did not.

‘How beautiful a woman!’ she murmured to Beltran, looking earnestly at the carriage as it passed. ‘She looks strangely at you. Who is she?’

‘The Marchioness of Isla,’ he answered her with all gravity, but with a little, serene, contemptuous smile about his mouth.

‘I have never seen her before, I think?’

‘No. But you have heard of her—as “Cléopâtre.”’

Fanfreluche had in nowise exaggerated: the woman whose first lovers had been found amidst the boisterous dalesmen and savage miners of the north, was now high in title, high in affluence, high in station. All the world knew her infamy; but

by the gracious fiction of your divine institution she had become blameless and without reproach—by marriage.

It seemed that she had drawn in this hapless boy beyond escape ; and had wedded him with such scrupulous heed of all formalities that nothing which his frantic family could do could obtain any reversal of the hideous folly that had given all dignities and all nobilities to the wanton of the northern wakes.

He was but a lad ; he was stubborn and simple ; he had been reared in grim creeds and in childish ignorance ; in the blinding blaze of his first liberty, in the sudden attainment of his mighty heritage, this woman had seized him as she might have seized some poor dazed bird long kept in darkness and confinement, and suddenly cast forth to stretch its untried wings in the full sunlight. He had been powerless to resist :—he had been held, and hooded, and fastened to that cruel and close-shut hand without a struggle.

You have seen such things before in this society of yours—seen them at least often enough for it to have become a known and dreaded thing that when the beardless boy of rank and wealth sits in the

public places of pleasure beside the gorgeous thing of infamy whom you have made a household word, it will be possible—almost probable—that she will not pause at stripping him of riches, at forcing him to pawn all future heritages, at making him a gamester, a bankrupt, a beggar, an outlaw, but will go farther, and compel from him the old gallant name of his fathers, the old fearless repute of his race: the old gems that flashed in his ancestors' faulchions, the old home where his mother reigned in honour.

It is not moral to tell you this, you say? Ah, no!—life itself is not moral. But it is true—it is undeniably true—that whilst you repulse with a shudder the poor painted outcasts of the streets, you gaze with interest on the famous wanton throned in her jewels at the opera; and from this, your countenance and complaisance, whilst the painted outcast goes to the police-court and the prison, the jewelled wanton may steal the honour of your name unchastised, and wed your young heir to eternal shame, unarraigned.

Need you marvel, then, that, beholding this contrast of issue, women—low, ignorant, made full of greed by want, made sick for money and pastime

by the inordinate envies and tawdry fashions of the poor of this age—say dimly to themselves ‘ Let us only be vile enough, we shall do well. All that are wanted are beauty and luck.’

And verily they have cause to say it.

It has often seemed to me that you might do much to scare the female vultures from their prey upon the youthful curled darlings of your proud races, if you declared by law all marriages invalid wherever the vileness of the wife’s previous life was a fact beyond dispute. It would be simple ; it would be rightful : for shall the meed of the just pass to the unjust ? shall the guerdon of honour abide with the thief ? Shall Faustina claim a place beside Lucretia ? Shall Phryne with the wine dropping roses of shame on her temples, presume to mate herself with Arria Pæta, with the white lilies of courage and innocence bound on her beautiful brows ?

But it is not done ; and meantime the courtesan can laugh her cynical laughter, and say in her heart, ‘ I will sin whilst it shall please me. When it ceases to please I can take the communion and—marriage !’

As for me, when I heard the world thus talk

of her, I felt stupid and aghast. My thoughts were busied with that old dead time, when the woman who now drove there in her pomp and power, watched by all eyes, and spoken of by all lips, had stood in the cottage-door under the rose-thorn, and chattered for glass beads and penny ribbons with the old pedlar of the Peak.

From the hour when she had stolen the coins of her brother's thrift and toil from under the moss by the apple-tree, this woman's life had been one long theft. Her hands had spared nought that her eyes saw and coveted; she had had no pity for youth; no mercy for ruin; no remorse at love; no shame at trust; she had had but one law for her life—the law of greed. If you would only bear in mind that this is the law of all such women's lives, the world would be spared much maudlin sentiment, and men much undeserved reproach.

That law Avice Dare, in all things the type and model of her class, had obeyed, without one pause for its infringement by any sort of gentler thought or better deed. She was cruel, because all low untutored human creatures ever are more cruel than any desert beast, or python of the

swamps : she was licentious, because women of her likeness, having but splendid vitality and bodily beauty, without any conscience, or intelligence, or soul within them, are always surrendered to the dominion of the senses : but beyond all, more than all, she was possessed with greed ; the same greed which had made her gloat over the mock stones and brazen jewellery of the pedlar’s pack, and steal, and pillage, and forsake all duty, and betray the loyal heart which trusted her, that she might flee to the ways of iniquity, and to the wages of shameful-ness. Greed of the basest sort—greed for the things of the senses ; for raiment, and food, and wine ; for horses, and chariots, and treasure ; for the laughter of fools, and the license of venal kisses ; for the envy of other women of the gems on her breast, and the gold in her hands.

And having fallen upon an Age which has elected to deify the courtesan, and wherein hard avarice, and keen passions for pelf and self, do prosper more greatly than any genius or attainment, or quality of the mind or character, this woman was rewarded for her sin.

She had not intelligence, she had not knowledge, she had no kind of pity, nor any sort of compre-

hension ; she was brainless as any savage that squats in his African hut ; she was only capable of such joys as the drowsy jewelled snake may know in his Mexican swamps ; she could eat, and drink, and could glitter gemlike in the sun, and could uncoil from gorged torpidity to kiss—or kill.

In a word, she was the courtesan of the nineteenth century, who, to all the license and all the cruelty of the wantons that turned their thumbs downward for their brawny paramours to die in Rome, has added all the vulgarities of modern ribaldry and all the chicaneries of modern civilization.

Hence, being thus suited to the Age which had begotten her, being thus its creature and its likeness, she had thriven in it as the snake thrives in hot and poisonous waters, which for all purer and healthier things breed death.

Luck, of course, there had been in it ; luck is the divinity of the soulless. Many women, having all the will to do the evil that she did, find themselves barred out for ever from the chance. Many fishers in the sea-depths of vice angle all through the day and bring to land nothing for their pains. Many like her in

their natures, and their passions, and their aims, but lacking either her supreme physical beauty, or her supreme good fortune, wander drenched and starving in the slimy rains of city streets at midnight, cursing vice, as others curse virtue, because its service is wretchedness, and its wage famine. Luck, truly, there had been in this amazing fate, which lifted the once sullen, ragged, unkempt peasant on to this eminence where all the world observed her—clothed in the purple, and environed with the ‘divinity that doth hedge’ the royalty of Gold.

But beyond all favours of chance, or circumstance, all aids of accident or opportunity, the chief reason of her fortune was that this woman was so entirely harmonious with her time, so utterly its true daughter in rapacity, in licentiousness, in egotism, in coarse hard lust of gold, and in dull, dead indifference to anything save gain. She had been callous to all misery she dealt, all need she left, all horror she entailed, throughout her whole career—as callous when she had drawn from the earth her brother’s silver pieces that had been saved by the hardness of his toil and the sweet patience of his self-negation, as now when she trod under her foot

a boy's guileless youth, and the lofty name of his race, and raised her head in the world's sight, crowned. Crowned in greatness, if crowned with a diadem from whose jewels the eagle-stone* of Honour had dropped, with the same moment that had raised it up to her shameless brow. Ah! well!—let but Kaiser or Courtezan seize their crown and wear it, they shall find courtiers and Coveteers enow; and for its gems,—the eagle-stone that knights held high as a stainless talisman, and that kings wore in the old, fair, fearless years of old, is out of use and out of fashion now.

* The ancient *pierre d'aigle*, supposed to be found in eagles' nests.
—ED.





CHAPTER XI.

BONNET BLANC.

‘**W**HAT a wonderful woman that is!’ said Fanfreluche to me a day or two later, with a sigh of passionate envy. ‘What do you think she has done? Not content with all the goods of earth, she has even secured herself immortality—*she has hired Philippe Rissôle!*’

And Fanfreluche for once held her breath in an absolute awe of amaze.

‘Immortality!’ I ventured to echo in bewilderment. ‘And who, then, pray, may be Philippe Rissôle, who can confer it?’

‘Oh heavens!’ cried Fanfreluche in a whirlwind of contempt. ‘What a thing it is to have lived in

a puppet-box and a garret ! Oh you ignoramus, you barbarian, you most miserable of outsiders ! *Who* is Philippe Rissôle ? He is the artist that made the Guards' Club sublime with his sauces ; he is the poet that made the French Embassy divine with his hors d'œuvres ; he is the maestro that made the Emperor of Russia cry, "I am greater than Cæsar," as he ate a cutlet in curl-papers ; he is the genius of whom it has been said that the Pope, embracing him, after a *jour maigre* of thirty services, mourned with tears that it was forbidden to send the Golden Rose to heads crowned with the glorious *bonnet blanc* of the kitchen. He is Philippe Rissôle, THE COOK ! And she has hired him—she !—whom you once saw washing her own potatoes to eat with black bread for a noon-day dinner. Oh, Lord ! Can the "masses" ask for a more absolute millennium of democracy than this topsy-turvey age in which an Avise Dare can live to hire a Philippe Rissôle !'

I was silent : I was not alive to the imperial greatness of a Rissôle, but I was struck dumb with a curious sense of marvellous strangeness as I thought of the woman whom I had once seen greedily devouring the gilded gingerbread and the

painted peppermint-sticks of a Wake fair-stall, now being qualified to dazzle the sight of the world with banquets fitted for princes !

‘ They call her a stupid woman,’ pursued Fanfreluche. ‘ Pshaw ! She has the very wit and wisdom that suits her Age. She is a splendid strategist ; there is not a man in the town, however lofty his rank, that will not accept invitations to dinners designed by Rissôle. She knows that those who are wise, seeking to rise, and desiring to win the kudos of their compeers, will not ask themselves, have they genius ? have they beauty ? have they wit ? have they power ? but will ask themselves only—can they give a good dinner ? If they are sure that they can—not a good dinner in the mere ordinary meaning of the word, but a dinner, original, voluptuous, harmonious, dulcet, a “ thing of beauty and a joy for ever,”—then they may know that sooner or later the world will be theirs. She sees this : she does not trust to her beauty or her splendour, to her riches or her wickedness, the world is full of such as these ; but she obtains Rissôle ! The only living man in Europe who can make an epic worthy of epicures ! To secure the cook of the century is to obtain the roc’s egg. Who is the

most successful diplomatist? He who most successfully entertains. Is there anything so humanizing as a perfect dinner? Anything that so tends to reconcile differences, and to smoothe aside prejudices? When a man eats exquisitely, he feels harmoniously and he thinks placidly. What epicure would propel a war that should ban the truffled turkeys of Paris from his own frontier? What gourmet would urge a "crusade for ideas" when the campaign would deprive him of the pâtés of Strasburg, of the ortolans of Lombardy, or of the caviare of Russia? A statesman will cast a nation recklessly into feud and famine when it is only the bread-rate of the poor that will have to rise, only the porridge-pot of the pauper that will have to be empty; but when he is a dinner-giver of consummate art, and understands the imperishable qualities of the truffle, and the imperative necessities for the foie-gras, he will be no party to dissension that shall leave his menus incomplete, and his cook disconsolate and unnerved. No one understands so well as an epicure the mutual dependence of the nations; for what dinner is worth anything to which all the nations do not contribute? Strike any one nation off the list of commerce, and you

strike some one dainty off the bill of fare. Were I a sovereign all my ambassadors should be the best dinner-givers of their times. Years ago I heard the appointment of Lord Courtly to the Viennese Embassy sorely questioned and sneered at; a man whom I know well openly attacked Lord Parmesan, then chief of F. O., upon the unjustifiable choice. "What single qualification does Courtly possess for such a post?" he persisted. "What single talent does he evince for such an eminence? You cannot point out one!" Parmesan laughed. "Yes, I can; he possesses Rissôle." Parmesan was shrewd and all-seeing amongst men; he knew that the pivot of all diplomacy turns within a stewpan. Avise Dare knows as much. Ere the season be over every man of note will have dined with the Marchioness of Isla. Philippe Rissôle will give her eminence in the present, and in the future immortality—for will not the dinners that he conceives and executes for her table be shrined in the Golden Books of gastronomic science for ever?

'The worst is,' added Fanfreluche, ending with a sigh her impassioned periods. 'The worst is—how can a woman who once peeled her own potatoes be ever capable of appreciating the genius of a

Rissôle? She loves eating, indeed: but what has a vulgar love of eating in common with the exquisite delicacies of gastronomical discrimination? The palate requires education from birth upwards; your only true epicure is ever of gentle breeding. But now—now—the canaille have all the cooks; and Milord Rôtüre and Miladi Cocotte give dinners that would have brought tears of ecstasy to the eyes of Brillât-Savarin, and all the while could not themselves tell for their lives an ortolan from a sparrow, or a canvas-back duck from a quack-quack of the gutter!’

I paid little heed to her; but her prophecies proved correct.

Isla House was opened with all the fresh magnificence of Louis Quinze decoration; the great cook created a series of dinners which surpassed anything that he had ever conceived for prince or minister; and whilst the town talked of her dauntless effrontery, of her *luxe effrayant*, of her infamy, and of her ostentation, half its lords and gentlemen went to criticise the wonders of her table; and their fair wives regretted her shame and her sin because these debarred them from honouring banquets prepared by Philippe Rissôle.



CHAPTER XII.

NELLIE'S PRAYER.

I WAS at the Private View yesterday,' said Fanfreluche, with a grin. 'How'd I get in? As I get everywhere, simpleton. I hide myself under a woman's dress,—for all the world as if I were a sin! And I keep so quiet; not a soul suspects me, a bit more than the public suspects the money that changes hands when the journals write a statesman into office, or an archbishop into the primacy. I was at the Private View. There is nothing there that comes near Gladys' portrait. All that mob of ministers, fine ladies, critics, dandies, and literati, were unanimous about it. It kills every other pic-

ture near—and yet there is so little colour about it! “That wonderful white!” they all say:—but it is the wonderful face above the white that charms them. Lady Otho was there; and Beltran was entangled with her party. He is always very courteous and friendly with her; he always is with his old loves. She looked very long at the picture; but she said nothing, except a few words of praise of the artist; but awhile after, in the miniature-room, he stood beside her, some way apart from any others. Then she addressed him, suddenly:

“That girl is very beautiful!”

“You have seen her on the stage, surely?” he answered carelessly.

‘She replied to him, with a touch of impatience: “On the stage,—of course! But they are so made up there—one never knows—”

‘He smiled. “She does not need to ‘make up.’ Have you any idea how young she is?”

‘I saw her long hazel eyes flash fire. “Is she not the girl you spoke to me of most romantically once—long ago? The sister of that dead boy, of that poet?”

‘He laughed. “*I* ‘romantic!’ surely that can never have been! Yes—she is the same.”

“And is it true what the world says of you and her—now?” She spoke hurriedly and almost fiercely; impulse must have been strong on her or she would never have deigned to stoop to such a question.

“Not in the least true,” he answered in his most negligent fashion; “though I don’t know whom it can concern.”

“Not true!” she echoed; “when you lavish all your wealth on her, spend all your time with her, are seen everywhere beside her!”

“Not true,” he answered again more coldly. “As for wealth—I have none left, and if I had she would only take the fair wage of her talent.”

She laughed a little; that laugh that it never does one good to hear. “Indeed! Ah!—pardon me if I cannot believe in your platonics.”

“Perhaps it is natural you should not,” he murmured, as he drew her attention to a miniature. She turned to the art-subject with ease and indifference, but her check burned hotly under its delicate rouge: she spoke no more of Gladys. Do you think it was severe? Well—she should not have provoked him. Women will never understand the wisdom of the “non quieta

movere," and they never will let "the dead past bury its dead," and comprehend that to open closed graves is unsightly.'

'But if she should still care for him?'

'My dear, as I told you, she cares enough to dislike to see him care for any other. Every woman loves enough for that. Even Avicé Dare would know *so* much of the grand passion. "Love!"—it is such a pretty synonym for all kinds of envies, and egotisms, and jealousies, and vicious desires. They are choice in their graceful synonyms, these dear human beings. They wrap a nauseous fact up in a gilded phraseology, until they take the pill like a bonbon. Pshaw! without that felicitous art do you think they would ever have managed to cheat themselves into forgetting their cousins the apes, and only acknowledging their cousins the angels?'

'There are men who hold to, and revere, straight simple truths,' I said staunchly, for I thought better of men than she did.

'Are there, my dear?' she replied with a grin. 'I never met them. I have heard a very great many men and women call the crows carrion birds, and the jackals carrion beasts, with an infinite deal of disgust and much fine horror at what they were

pleased to term "feasting on corpses;" but I never yet heard any one of them admit their own appetite for the rotten "corpse" of a pheasant, or the putrid haunch of a deer, to be any thing except the choice taste of an epicure !'

'But they do cook the corpses !' I remonstrated ; whereupon she grinned with more meaning than ever.

'Exactly what I am saying, my dear. Their love of synonyms has made them forget that they are Carnivori, because they talk so sweetly of the Cuisine. A poor, blundering, honest, ignorant lion only kills and eats when the famine of his body forces him to obey that law of slaughter which is imposed on all created things, from the oyster to the man, by what we are told is the beautiful and beneficent economy of Creation. Of course, the lion is a brutal and bloodthirsty beast of prey, to be hunted down off the face of the earth as fast as may be. Whereas man—what does he do ? He devours the livers of a dozen geese in one pâté ; he has lobsters boiled alive, that the scarlet tint may look tempting to his palate ; he has fish cut up or fried in all its living agonies, lest he should lose one *nuance* of its flavour ; he has the calf and the lamb killed in their

tender age, that he may eat dainty sweetbreads ; he has quails and plovers slaughtered in the nesting season, that he may taste a slice of their breasts ; he crushes oysters in his teeth whilst life is in them ; he has scores of birds and animals slain for one dinner, that he may have the numberless dishes which fashion exacts ; and then—all the time talking softly of rissôle and mayonnaise, of consommé and entremêt, of croquette and cotelette,—the dear gourmet discourses on his charming Science, and thanks God that he is not as the parded beasts that prey !’

‘ Well,’ said I sulkily, for I am fond myself of a good vol au vent, ‘ Well, you have said that eating is a law in the economies—or the waste—of creation. Is it not well to clothe a distasteful and barbaric necessity in a refining guise and under an elegant nomenclature ?’

‘ Sophist !’ said Fanfreluche, with much scorn, though she herself is as keen an epicure and as suave a sophist, for that matter, as I know. ‘ I never denied that it was well for men to cheat themselves, through the art of their cooks, into believing that they are not brutes and beasts of prey—it is well exceedingly—for their vanity.

Life is sustained only by the destruction of life. Cookery, the divine, can turn this horrible fact into a poetic idealism ; can twine the butcher's knife with lilies, and hide the carcase under roses. But I do assuredly think that, when they sit down every night with their *menu* of twenty services, they should not call the poor lion bad names for eating an antelope once a fortnight.'

And, with the true consistency of preachers, Fanfreluche helped herself to a Madeira-stewed kidney which stood amongst other delicacies on the deserted luncheon table.

We were in the inner portion of Beltran's chambers ; I occasionally strayed across the length of the park, and found my way thither. I had grown wary of all thieves' beguilements and strata-gems ; and I liked dearly to find myself once more in those well-beloved spacious apartments, with their deep, soft, blue colour, and their charming confusion of bric-à-brac ; their masculine litter and their artistic luxuries ; their familiar scent of cigar smoke, and their quaint bits of priceless vertu.

For picturesque charm, and for true comfort and luxuriousness, I do not think there is no mansion in

the town which can approach some of those perfectly arranged chambers that look out on the Green Park, or stud the various streets of the quarter of St James. They have all a woman's elegance and all a man's negligence: the combination is perfection.

Whilst she ate her kidney, and I dozed on a couch, there entered into the outer room his sister, the Countess of Leintwardine; a woman of noble presence, wearing her forty or more years with bloom and majesty.

Beltran, who was at that moment going out to his phaeton below, met her face to face; he stood still and bent his head to her in silence.

She came quickly up to him; she was an impulsive woman despite her dignity.

'Vere,—don't let *us* be estranged,' she said softly. 'I did not think what I said!—'

He gave her his hand instantly; he was not a man to refuse to meet such an advance.

'I am afraid you did think,' he said with a smile. 'It was the thought I resented—'

'Oh no—oh no,' she said a little hurriedly. 'I never think anything against you. Surely you know that?'

‘Why do you not take my word, then?’ he asked quietly.

‘They are such very strange circumstances,’ she murmured; ‘so very equivocal!’

He raised his eyebrows a little, and moved an armchair towards her in silence.

‘No, thanks. I am in a hurry homeward,’ she said, leaning her hand on the back of the chair. ‘I only came to see if you were here—one never has a chance to speak a serious word in society. As you were alone I could not help saying to you,—let my injurious words be forgotten, and believe, oh, always believe, Vere, that you have no truer friend than I am, no one who loves you more dearly than I do. And if I grieve over—over—some things in what seems to me a wasted career, it is only, only, my brother, because I remember too tenaciously and too fondly the hopes and the promises of your youth.’

He listened, touched by the words, moved yet more by the tears that stood in the eyes of this haughty and worldly-wise woman of his race. He was silent a moment, then he answered her:

‘You cannot be more dissatisfied with my life than I am; but,—which of my contemporaries is

more content with his own? Satiety lies like a curse on us all; and it is little odds whether it be born of ambition or of pleasure. Perhaps, if you knew all, you might not think mine so utterly wasted, though it is idle and barren of renown; but,—that does not matter much; it is certainly selfish and useless enough not to be worth a defence. Yet—listen to me an instant. You know that I should not lie to you?’

‘Nor to any one,’ she said, looking on him with a proud and sad tenderness.

He bent his head.

‘Well—you say, too, that you bear me some love. Listen to me, then. More than a year ago, I told you that had my mother been living I should have taken Gladys Gerant to her. You heard:—but you refused to assist me; you refused to lend her your countenance. What you refused to do, I could not ask of any woman less near to me. When I sought to interest any in her they met me with the question,—“What does your sister say?” To such a question I could give no answer; you had deprived me of one. What has been the consequence? That in lieu of being honoured by the world as her gifts and her purity demand, she

is classed by the world with its most venal order, and nothing that I can do or declare can move one hair's-breadth of the weight of calumny off her. Now, on my faith as a gentleman, this woman you condemn is as innocent as your own daughters; of her beauty and her genius you have judged publicly; to the exquisite grace and nobility of her mind and heart no words of mine could ever render justice. You have spoken of my youth; in her presence alone do its better instincts revive, does its dead promise still seem capable of resurrection. Beatrice, it is not too late. Will you—even now—go to her; have faith in her; lend her the shield of your high name, prove to the world that my sister at least believes that I do not lie? It is not too late—you occupy the station from which it is possible to stem the tide of slander. Let her once be seen with you, and you will save her for ever from the vileness and the cowardice of calumnies which she is too innocent ever to imagine can assail her; and from which I—a man, and her reputed lover—am utterly powerless to defend her life. You believe me, you say—will you do this for my sake, and the sake of truth?’

He spoke for the sole time in his life with sad and

passionate earnestness : it was not for himself that he pleaded ; and his words followed one another eagerly, eloquently, unselfishly ; with a prayer which one would have thought no woman ever could have heard in vain.

His sister listened, the tears in her haughty eyes ; she bowed her head as he paused, and over her bent face passed tremulous shadows of yielding and of regret. She sighed, and stretched out her hands to him.

‘ Anything but that—anything ! It is not possible—an actress—my daughters—think what the world would say of me ! ’

His teeth clenched on his lip ; he was bitterly wounded.

‘ Need a woman of my race pause for *that* ! ’ he muttered with passionate scorn. He had been unwise enough to hope ; he had stooped his pride to plead. His disappointment was intense ; his mortification supreme.

She laid her hands upon his arm.

‘ O, Vere ! I do believe—I do indeed. She is beautiful, exceedingly, and no doubt she is all else that you say, but the world holds her as your mistress ; I cannot subject my children—’

‘That is enough!’ he said sternly. ‘If you came here for peace, not for feud, you had best say no more!’

‘But you forgive me? You will not be angered again?’

He smiled; his coldest and most evil smile.

‘Angered? Because you prove so true to your sex and your order? Oh no—oh no!’

She would have answered him, but he went to the door, bade his servant call the Lady Leintwardine’s carriage, and led her with grave and graceful courtesy down the stairway to the street below.

‘Do you know what Gladys is to him now, my dear?’ said Fanfreluche grimly.

‘Scarcely!’ I murmured bewildered.

‘Then I will tell you,’ she answered with caustic curtness. ‘She is the only woman whom he has loved in all the length of his life.’

The voices of the dilettanti were echoed by the public crowd when the doors of the Academy were opened to these last. There was no picture so sought as that of the Cupbearer of Vortigern. Its recognition as a portrait was its chief interest to the multitude; but even those who only came to it

for this coarser reason were touched into silence and admiration before that spiritual, proud, poetic face, that had so little in its look of earthly care or earthly thought. Over the lightest and lowest that came thither it had a strange subduing power, which hushed the common parlance on their tongues, and sent them mute and wondering away.

‘This picture has increased your celebrity ten-fold, Gladys,’ said Beltran to her on the third day of its exhibition, when he strolled beside her through the green aisles of her pretty garden.

She smiled: the smile so pathetic in its meditation and its eloquence, that was on the mouth of the daughter of Hengist.

‘I do not care for that! But—if it would make the people love me a little I should be glad.’

‘Why do you want that?’ Beltran asked her gently.

‘I do not know,’ she said with half a sigh. ‘But—when you see those thousands looking at you night after night, all strangers, all nameless to you, yet all caring so little for you that, if you died ere the play were ended, they would only feel themselves cheated of their spectacle, you cannot help wishing that you had a little of their friendship, a little of

their love, and were not only to them just a mere toy to be watched, a mere mechanism to be dissected.'

'With all your genius how little you are fit for the stage—for *our* stage! Great heavens!' he muttered, and he paced the lawn with his head bent as he spoke.

Then he came to her, and took her hands in his.

'Gladys, sometimes it seems to me like a crime to have brought your youth, your innocence, your divine nature into such a world as this of ours. Oh, my child, if ever you should reproach me!—'

She lifted her eyes to him in wonder; she seldom saw him thus moved. Then she stooped, and with an exquisite grace and obeisance in the action, touched his hand with her lips.

'Reproach! I! If you choose to kill me you would have a right to my life. You, who have bestowed on me everything on earth!'

'Hush, hush!' said Beltran almost harshly. 'You owe me nothing! God grant only that you may never blame me.'

She looked at him with a smile—that smile of ineffable exhaustless faith which ever makes the face it lightens half divine.

She loved him—it was so easy to see—with such perfect tenderness, such absolute adoration. She hardly knew it; he was ‘her friend;’ he used none of the language of lovers; he had never, as he had said, touched her lips with his own; he subjugated whatever passion he might feel with a stern self-control unlike any other thing in his self-indulgent and too reckless life. But love for him had grown into the religion of her existence.

Although he had never let her know the extent of the services he had rendered her, veiling them under generous fictions of her art, and of its values, yet there was much that he could not conceal. Through him alone she had been raised as by magic from utter misery, want, obscurity, and desolation, to perfect ease, elegance, peace, and fame. In truth, her debt to him was measureless; and yet vaster than she even dreamed:—for she knew not of those depths of the world’s dangers, or of the perils to her of his own passion, from which he continually defended her: defended her even against himself, because his simple creed, ‘the good faith of a gentleman’ forbade him to injure what lay defenceless at his mercy.

Ah! revile that old faith as you will, it has lasted

longer than any other cultus ; and whilst altars have reeled, and idols been shattered, and priests changed their teachings, and peoples altered their gods, the old faith has lasted through all ; and the simple instinct of the Greek eupatrid and of the Roman patrician still moves the heart of the English gentleman—the instinct of *Noblesse oblige*.

She loved him, as I say, with sweetest, highest, most innocent, and yet most passionate devotion. In her eyes, in her voice, in her unasked submission to him, in her countenance when he entered the place where she was, she betrayed it utterly, because utterly ignorant of the true meaning of this concentration of her whole life in his which to her seemed simplest gratitude.

He had been much loved by many women ; men of his type ever are so ; many a woman of the world had been stung by his listless contempt, or beguiled by his indolent wooing, into a passion that had become the one real, vital, undying thing in all her artificial existence. Many a young girl, like poor Nellie, had spent on him all the freshness and fervour of her heart in a worship won merely by some gentle, careless word, or some kindly glance from those eyes commonly so cold

and weary, in which he had meant no more than a man means when he gives a caress to a playful horse. But although far and wide he had awakened more love than he ever needed or heeded, he had not ever been loved as he was now by this creature who owed all to him; this poet who had all the strength and the elevation of genius, this child who had all the innocence and trustfulness of infancy. To few men is it given to be thus loved, with a love in which the mind bears as great and pure a part as the heart, and the intelligence is centered no less than the passions.

It was a jewel of price which fell in his path, and often I wondered whether he would tread it down in the earth at the last beneath his foot, or whether he would raise it up as he went, and cherish it in safety in his breast?

Sometimes I thought that the mists of the sins and the satieties of the world were still so darkly about him that he saw not its value, and would crush it carelessly in mere negligence: and at others I thought that he knew its beauty so well that he deemed his own hand not unsullied enough ever to touch and to take it.

The world held him closely; he had been with

it and of it so long; he was so deeply steeped in its tired, sceptical, gay, dissolute temper; he had so long learned to think with it that nothing was desirable save the distraction of the immediate moment, and the banishment of all emotional weakness.

But the world could not wholly absorb a man to whom, in the years of his youth, a lofty ambition had murmured its dreams, and an ideal love had shadowed its meaning. The ambition had died, stifled by pleasure; the ideal had been forgotten, supplanted by the senses. But sometimes I thought that, when he gazed in the soul-lit eyes of Gladys, and heard the eloquence of her poetic thoughts, both the dreams and the faiths of his boyhood came back to him, and that he no longer sought an intrigue, an idleness, a selfish indulgence, a plaything for the passions, but at last also—loved. And loved, at length, so well that he denied desire and restrained passion.

Meanwhile—whilst this struggle hid its violence in his proud silent heart, and this self-negation was covered by his proven armour of careless and caustic indifference—all his familiar friends had, of course, decided for him that he was a libertine, successful as usual, and that she was a toy for whom

he showed somewhat more gentleness than common.

Indeed I often wonder to hear the complaints that are made as to the slightness and scarce sincerities of the friendship of this day.

I know not why you complain ; there was surely never an era when your friends took more active interest in the discussion and disposal of your affairs, or took more trouble to ensure that the very worst possible should be said of you.

What more can you want ? I assure you that society thinks much better of you the more evil it deems you. They called him now fearfully immoral, and respected him : if they had been told the truth and been brought to believe it, they would have certainly thought him a fool or a madman, and he would have sunk in their estimation accordingly.

When any of this that they said of himself drifted home to him he smiled ; he was a man of the world : but now and then when he was alone he ceased for a moment to be a man of the world, and then his teeth clenched and his eyes darkened—because he thought of her.

‘ Good God ! what a society we live in, in which a woman’s innocence is a thing incredible ! ’

he said once in a rare moment of impulsive utterance to his friend Denzil.

‘Nay,’ said Denzil with a smile that had all the bitterness of his dead love in it. ‘Let her lose her innocence, and she will find champions enough!’

Is the saying dark to you who read? Ah, then! you do not know society.

In the same week that the Academy opened I was lying in the sun upon the lawn; the garden of the villa was blooming with jonquils and hyacinths; the hawthorn shrubberies were in their first budding bloom; the birds in the conservatory were singing, amidst azaleas and camellias, and their music came through the open doors.

All was sweet and sunny; through one of the pretty mullioned casements I saw the luxurious little library within; Gladys sat there, reading at an oak lectern; the rich dark velvet of her skirts had the colour of a Titian picture; and her delicate head seemed painted in gold upon the shadow of the deep-hued chamber.

All was picture-like; all full of fragrance; all eloquent of a peace around which gold had drawn a charmed circle that pain could not break.

The roll of the carriages in the streets and roads

beyond the walls was only dully heard ; only pleasantly suggestive of the gay and endless life around.

As I half dreamed and half slumbered, in my calm reverie, in my sunlit resting place, there came to me Fanfreluche ; pressing through the bronze scroll-work of the entrance gate with the daring independence of her habitual movements.

She approached more slowly than was her wont, and I saw that her brilliant eyes were for once dim and troubled.

‘I have ill tidings,’ she said simply. ‘Nellie is dead.’

‘Dead!’ I could only echo the word dully and stupidly.

‘Yes—you asked me of her some time ago. She is dead of cold, and exertion, and fever; brought on by sitting up many nights with a little ballet girl of the Palace Theatre; little Clarice Vaughan, who sickened and died first of a sort of low fever, they say.’

‘Dead, dead, since when?’ I muttered stupidly still; death seemed to me a thing that it was impossible to utter in the same breath with the name of that sturdy, rosy, blue-eyed young creature,

saucy as a boy, blythe as a bird, untiring as a chamois, the little dauntless dare-devil, who feared neither man nor woman !

‘ Since an hour ago—only,’ Fanfreluche answered me gravely, without a touch of mockery or any caustic word. ‘ She was ill but a brief time, I think. We were about to drive to Hurlingham to-day, when a little tattered boy came up ; the grooms pushed him away, but Beltran listened to him. He said that Nell Brown was dying, and the old Granny had sent him ; would my lord let Nell see him afore she died ? they thought she wouldn’t live an hour. Beltran, without a word, turned his horses’ heads to that poor place where she dwelt. You saw it once ? I was already in the phaeton ; and descended and followed him as he went through the house ; the old woman weeping and wringing her hands, and crying sorely because she was all alone in the world at eighty year, and moaning out how “ Nellie, as was such a rare good child, if ’twarn’t for her wild humours, had been so wilful and so mad, and had dug her own grave, say all as one would, a’tending little Annie Dell, as had been down with fever, and dead and buried mor’n two weeks agone.” Beltran answered her with a few words of pity and

consolation; and was ushered by her into the little chamber where you once saw Gladys Gerant saved from famine—and worse.

‘Nellie was stretched upon her little truckle-bed; the sun came in over the roofs, the canary moped in his cage, the golden creeper hung withering for want of water; the little room was full of gay and tawdry ribbons, and gauzes, and tinsel, and all the glitter of stage costume. Her eyes were closed; her face had lost all its colour and roundness; there was a terrible blue pallor about the mouth. I thought that she was dead already; so did he.

‘He went up to the bed, and stooped over her with a few gentle words. His voice seemed to electrify her; her eyes opened suddenly, with a blinded senseless look; her breath came fast and stifled.

‘“Do you not know me, Nellie?” he asked her—so gently still. “My poor girl—why not have told us of your illness earlier? If I had only heard—if I had only dreamt—”

‘She gazed at him with more of comprehension, and a sudden flash came over the greyness of her face that gave it once more something of its fresh and rosy hues.

“I sent—I sent,” she gasped. “I don’t know how I dared—but you was always so good, my lord.”

“*Dare* is no word between you and me, Nellie,” he answered her. “You had the courage to stay my hand once, in a passion that was making me a brute. I owe you much: only tell me how I can pay it.”

‘Her dull strained eyes, that had lost all their old, smiling, azure light, looked up at him piteously. She gasped for breath—for speech—once or twice vainly.

“If only you would have let me help you!” he said to her. “But you would never take anything from me—not even such influence and interest as I may possess. It is not too late now, you are so young, so strong; I will get you all the aid, all the science, that the town holds—”

‘She interrupted him with a plaintive motion of her bright curly head, that hung so languidly, like a wounded bird’s.

“I’m as good as dead,” she muttered slowly and feebly; “else—I wouldn’t have sent—never—never! But I want to say one word, sir—if you won’t be angered—”

“ Say on, Nellie.”

‘ There was an infinite pity in his voice ; he had seen death often enough to know that the hope which he had held out to her was utterly vain.

‘ Still, with her eyes gazing up at him, so woe-fully, so prayerfully, she spoke her feeble and broken words :

“ I wanted to say—I’ve heard, my lord, all manner of evil things of *her*—and you. I’ve heard that—that—she have come to shame, though it’s a gilded one ; and I know—I know—as it’s a lie ! ”

“ It *is* a lie.”

‘ His face was very dark, his voice was very grave, as he answered her.

“ I said so !—I said so ! ” she murmured, her hoarse weak voice for the moment ringing with melody and strength once more. “ I said as she was innocent and pure as any little child—lie all they would. And I kep’ away from her,—because the likes o’ me seen near her couldn’t but do her harm ; me being so common, and so ignorant, and so low like upon the stage ; and she so beautiful, and so learned, and so great a lady, one may say. But—but you know as they do say all them things of you and her?—you know what she be thought

to be? You know as she'll never be cleared of what they talk—never, never, never!”

““I know!”

‘The wooden rail of the chair, on which his hands rested, was broken by the clench of them upon it as he spoke.

““But it won't ever be *true*?” she cried, raising herself upon one arm, and conquering for that brief space the agonies and the weakness of death. “You'll never make it *true*? It don't half matter if it isn't true. You see—you see, sir—it all came through me, her knowing of you first. I don't think I could lie quiet in my grave if she ever lived to curse me for it. And she *would* curse me—when she came to see as she was scorned! Oh, promise me, my lord, as she shan't ever have no cause—promise me, promise me, she'll live and die in honour!”

‘He was silent awhile; then he gently bowed his head.

““I do promise you—so far as in me lies to keep her so.”

‘Her eyes closed; her chest heaved.

““Thank God,” she murmured. “I never doubted you—I never doubted.”

“ If you did not, you had a rarer faith than any friend I hold ! But, Nellie, speak rather of yourself ; tell me what I can do for you. My poor child, you shall not die at such years as yours ! ”

‘ A wan, faint, bitter smile played over her drawn, parched lips.

“ What matter years ? ” she muttered. “ Maybe it’s best. I’d have had to go on for ever, act—act—act. And even now—I was tired : very tired sometimes. Tell her I loved her always—will you ? Don’t let her think as I’d ceased to care— ”

“ But tell me something you wish done—for yourself—for yourself alone ! ”

‘ He spoke earnestly, urgently ; he saw that, with every second, sense and thought and sight were dying in her.

“ There’s nothing,” she gasped feebly. “ Ph’raps if you’d be good enow to keep old Gran from want ? She’s nobody but me ; and I couldn’t save—much.”

‘ He stooped over her tenderly.

“ She shall never need whilst she lives. Is there nothing else—nothing ? ”

‘ Her curly head drooped more heavily still ; her eyes looked once more up at him through the dulness and mists of death.

“No—no. If so be you wouldn't mind—put your hand once on my forehead: I think I'd die easier so.”

‘He stooped lower, and in answer laid his lips softly on her brow.

‘A flush of dreamy warmth drove for one moment the ghastly pallor from her face; she trembled from head to foot, and her eyes shone with a deep ecstasy; then—even in that same moment—she shivered, stretched her limbs out, and died.

‘He stood beside her, with his head bowed and his eyes dim: he, whom the world deems callous to all pain and indifferent to all tenderness, was touched to the heart by this simple, pure, unspoken love that had been borne him, all unasked and unrecompensed, so long and so silently by this little untutored, careless, audacious child of the populace, who had shown her lithe form and her fair face to the public gaze for the wage of his coin.

‘The sun shone in over the roofs; the bird in its cage began a low tremulous song; the murmur of all the crowded streets came up upon the silence; and Nellie lay there dead;—the light upon her curly hair, and on her mouth the smile that had come there at his touch.

‘ Ah, my dear ! ’ said Fanfreluche, as she ceased her story, with a half soft and half sardonic sadness, ‘ she was but a little, ignorant, common player, who made but three pounds a week, and who talked the slang of the streets, and who thought shrimps and tea a meal for the gods, and who made up her own dresses with her own hands, out of tinsel and tarlatan and trumperies, and who knew no better than to follow the blind dumb instincts of good that, self-sown and uncultured, lived in her—God knows how !—as the harebells, with the dew on them, will live amidst the rank coarse grass of graveyards. She was but a poor little player, who had tried to be honest where all was corruption, who had tried to walk straightly where all ways were crooked. So she died to-day in a garret, my dear ; and—have you heard that the young Lord of Isla has bought his wife an estate in the south that covers nearly one half of its county ? ’

* * * * *

The night of Nellie’s death there was a late card party in his rooms. I had strayed there, and stayed with Fanfreluche. There were none but men ; they played long and gamed high ; it was the rule in his set. It was almost morning when they broke up,

and went on their ways. Denzil remained behind them. He had strolled away to the great piano, and was playing quaint, dreamy fragments of various melodies, whilst he smoked.

‘Go on,’ said his friend briefly, where he lay stretched on a couch by the hearth, and Denzil obeyed.

The grey smoke-clouds circled around them, as the dull vapour of satiety had drifted around all their pleasures and passions; the waves of sound rolled through the silence in soft, sad, weirdly eloquence; Beltran never stirred, he was lost in thought. Denzil arose and came to the hearth.

‘What are you thinking of?’ he asked.

‘Your music.’

‘No doubt! But besides?’

‘Besides,’ echoed Beltran slowly, as he raised himself and stood erect. ‘Well, besides—I was wondering whether Cæsar was true to his Order when he said that it was not enough for his wife to be pure, since she was not also above public suspicion; or whether he was but a cowardly cur, who cloaked social timidity in a grand period, and shrank before the mud pellets of social opinion. Which was it—eh?’

Denzil looked at him quickly : ‘ You mean— ? ’

‘ I mean—that I must either be traitor to my race or traitor to a woman. I am undecided which to select. *Noblesse oblige*. It is an admirable creed, only a little unsatisfactory when it points two diametrically opposite ways. Get out with you ;—it is late. Good-night ! ’

When his friend was gone he paced to and fro the length of the chambers.

‘ Am I a brute or a fool,’ he muttered, ‘ when I know the purity of that perfect life ! ’

And he walked to and fro, to and fro, in that ceaseless, restless measure, till the sunrise glowed ruddily through the closed shutters.

As at length he passed to his bed he paused a moment before another portrait ; a portrait of age, not of youth,—but of age in all its noblest benignity, its most venerable beauty. It was the portrait of his dead mother.

‘ The House might deem itself sullied ; but *you* would not, were you living,’ he murmured. Then he went and threw himself on his bed, and slept as the sun rose. His rest was troubled, and on his face in his dreams there were the shadows of sleepless passions.



CHAPTER XIII.

‘GITHA.’

‘**I**F this play should succeed it will be a triumph of true art,’ said another critical writer to Dudley Moore, on the eve of a fresh play at the Coronet Theatre.

That great personage tapped his Louis Quinze snuff-box with some impatience.

‘Pardon me, but it is not possible to have Art at all on the stage. Art is a pure idealism. You can have it in a statue, a melody, a poem ; but you cannot have it on the stage, which is at its highest but a graphic realism. The very finest acting is only fine in proportion as it is an exact reproduction of physical life. How, then, can it be art, which

is only great in proportion as it escapes from the physical life into the spiritual ? ’

‘ But may not dramatic art escape thither also ? ’ asked the critic, who was young and deferred to him.

‘ Impossible, sir. It is shackled with all the forms of earth, and—worse still—with all its shams and commonplaces. When we read *Othello*, we only behold the tempest of the passions and the wreck of a great soul ; but when we see *Othello*, we are affronted by the colour of the Moor’s skin, and we are brought face to face with the vulgarities of the bolster ! ’

‘ Then there is no use in a stage at all ? ’

‘ I am not prepared to conclude that. It is agreeable to a vast number of people ; as a Frith or an O’Neil is agreeable to a vast number of people to whom an Ary Scheffer or a Delaroche would be unintelligible. It is better, perhaps, that this vast number should look at Friths and O’Neils than that they should never look on any painting at all. Now, the stage paints rudely, often tawdrily ; still it does paint. It is better than nothing. I take it that the excellence, as the end, of histrionic art is to portray, to the minds of the many, poetic con-

ceptions which, without such realistic rendering, would remain unknown and impalpable to all save the few. Histrionic art is at its greatest only when it is the follower and the interpreter of literature ; the actor translates the poet’s meanings into the common tongue that is understood of the people. But how many on the miserable stage of this country have ever had either humility to perceive, or capability to achieve, this ? ’

The other critic smiled.

‘ I imagine not one,—in our day. Their view of their profession is similar to Mrs Delamere’s when Max Moncrief wrote that sparkling comedy for her. “ My dear,” she said to him, “ why did you trouble yourself to put all that wit and sense into it ? We didn’t want *that*. I shall wear all my diamonds, and I have ordered three splendid new dresses ! ” ’

Dudley Moore laughed curtly.

‘ That is Delamere *aux bouts de ses ongles*. Our stage is but an asylum for men who are tired of sitting on clerks’ stools, and women who are tired of using a seamstress’s scissors. Yet such a stage as *this* we passively permit to be lauded by our public writers, while we inanely chatter of the decadence of taste ! Good God ! We might with as

much justice make the House of Commons a cage for 500 parrots and apes, and complain of the decadence of oratory and of statecraft! And, indeed,' he added with a grim chuckle, 'the parrots and apes would more nearly resemble the politicians they would displace than do the players of our day resemble the art which they affect to represent.'

The eyes of the younger critic went to the figure of Gladys.

'Surely she has genius?' he murmured; 'you have yourself said so.'

'Sir,' said Dudley Moore, very curtly, 'I have said so certainly; though what men say of a lovely woman is generally to be taken with a pinch of salt! But because acting is not art, it does not follow that an actor or an actress may not, here and there, be an artist. The great player is like the great orator,—half a poet.'

It was a few days previous to that pleasant water party that the mighty *magister* spoke thus, at a morning rehearsal which he had deigned to attend: the rehearsal of a new and picturesque play which had been written for her by a scholarly and famous author, and cast in those old poetic and heroic moulds which have been broken into pot-

sherds under the crowbars of the felons, and the wheels of the street cabs, of the modern drama.

The play was indeed fraught with many perils. To commence with, it read so well in the closet that it was almost certain it must go ill on the boards ; further, it was cast in a bygone time, the Saxon time of England, and was penetrated with the high and simple spirit of that dead age.

It was slight of structure, inasmuch as the writer—wisely doubtful of the powers of the herd of men and women who, calling themselves artists, and receiving high wage in your capital, would be hissed off the boards of any minor provincial town of France or Italy—had centered all the strength, pathos, and sustaining power of the piece on the one central figure,—a woman. Of course this absorption of all interest into one focus was not artistically symmetrical, but what is a poet to do when he writes for a stage whereon the actors declaim with the accent of Cockaigne, and move with the grace of wooden Fantoccini ? His noblest diction will, he knows, halt in false quantities through no fault of his own ; and the supreme art of the histrion—the art of gesture,—will, he knows likewise, be either unattempted or caricatured.

With these difficulties before him, he had cast almost the whole burden of his dramatic creation on the one woman in whose hands he felt that such a trust was safe.

He was sensible of the offences of his play; he was aware that it was harmonious in treatment, subdued in colour, calm in action, pandering nowise either to the prejudices or the puerilities of the multitude: and yet it was hoped that all these offences might be pardoned to it through—not her genius, for genius alone is a rococo thing who speaks in archaisms—but through the fashion of Gladys Gerant.

Besides, it was to be made a gorgeous spectacle; and it was trusted that in the splendid series of pictures and the masses of men brought on in its groupings of camp and castle, monastery and witanagemot, the public would be for once induced to pardon intellect in the dialogues and nobility in the passions.

‘Utterly unfitted for the present stage,’ said Dudley Moore, when the play was accepted after a noon reading of it at the theatre. ‘Utterly! But it is just possible that if you smother the sense of it under a weight of gorgeous decoration; that if

you disgrace its classic treatment by a quantity of barbaric magnificence, such as the age it is cast in can afford; if you get some novel effect in moonlight, or on water, and give two set scenes to each act, calling them “tableaux,” you may contrive, by dazzling the sight of the audience, to make them pardon their being asked to sit out a work of eloquence and of sense. Indeed, if you could introduce a jongleur or mumming scene midway, and get that new conjuror, who is performing miracles at the Egyptian Hall, to appear in it, with his bouquets and serpents, the piece might not, perhaps, quite ruin you. It might even keep the boards for a month.’

These sarcastic counsels had been followed seriously,—all, indeed, except the adoption of the juggler,—and the play was magnificently put upon the stage in a series of exquisite historic pictures, carefully compiled from Holinshed and Sharon Turner, Guillaume de Poitiers and the Roman de Rou.

‘It will ruin you,’ they said to Beltran, who laughed in his negligent fashion.

‘When one is to break one’s neck, it don’t much matter whether it’s over a five-bar or a six, that I

can see.' And with the inborn recklessness that was covered under his quiet manner, he spared no cost accordingly.

So the play was to be put forth with the spring-tide of the year, and its various scenes—the encampment, the abbey, the vast untouched forests, the gathering of the monks for vespers, the noontide fight by the ford over the sumpter mules, the feasts of the Eorldermen in their Mead Halls—all were to afford spectacles that would to the uttermost serve to induce the public to pardon the startling heresies of meaning and of feeling in the words that were uttered. The scene-painter's skill had been strained to the furthest to purchase forgiveness of the poet's presence.

If you perfectly occupy the eyes of a London playgoer, he will not resent, because he will not note, that you offend his ear with the dead languages of eloquence and sense. Perhaps he may regret that such fine grouping and charming 'sets' are not more worthily wedded to some punning doggerel, but he will not resent actively: though he will doubtless feel that he has scarcely had all he should have had for his money.

Moreover, this play was prepared and an-

nounced in those young April weeks when first on men's lips came the rumours of the picture of the cupbearer of Vortigern. Those who had seen it in the studio spoke widely of it in language that awoke interest and curiosity; and the portrait had scarce been revealed to the general public when the play of ‘Githa’ was put forth, and it was known that she would appear in the old Saxon garb that was worn by the daughter of Hengist.

A trifle like this goes far to arouse and to rivet public attention; and served, amongst others, to make the town ready, and even willing, to excuse the mistake which had chosen an author in lieu of an adapter, a poem in the place of a police report.

The first representation was appointed for the day that followed on Nellie's death. Of that death he did not tell her: and it was too obscure for public rumour or record to take it to her ear. A little dancing girl—one out of hundreds—worth nothing when the lissom energy was once out of her limbs. What name could she leave? What moment of recollection could the busy world give her?

He knew that he must tell her sooner or later, but he shrank—with that kind of tender cowardice which so peculiarly belongs to men who are for

themselves sternest, hardest, and least apt to fear—from wounding in any way this heart that had known so much of sorrow in its childhood, and had only so lately basked in joy. He withheld from her all things that could pain her, with an excess of care that had its perils for her; for, so perfect did this life seem in which she dwelt, that insensibly she grew to believe that its beauty must endure, shadowless, for ever; and insensibly, in her trust in him, she lost the strength and self-reliance that she had once possessed amidst adversity.

When her brief life had been but a little frail field-blossom, left desolate on the crumbled walls of a fallen house, to bear night and storm as best it should, and to be blown on by all rude winds of heaven, it had been steadfast and unblanched. But now that it was a hot-house flower, guarded from every chilling breath, and environed with perpetual sunlight; now—I sometimes feared that it would break and perish at the first rough touch—wither in the first lone hour of midnight.

‘You are not afraid of your powers to-night?’ he asked her in the afternoon of this day on which ‘Githa’ was first to be given to the world.

She smiled in his eyes.

‘When you tell me to be afraid I will be,—not until then.’

The trustful words smote his conscience : if he dealt truly with her—truly as he had promised to the dead girl—would he not bid her be ‘afraid’ now? Afraid, not of herself, but of him? I saw this thought told in his eyes.

‘Do not depend so much upon me,’ he said gently and sadly. ‘You are a poet; you are an artist; you have genius; you must not rest your nobler existence on such a useless and prosaic life as mine. I am no poet, Gladys; I am only a tired, selfish, good-for-nought man of the world.’

She smiled still; that beautiful serene smile of divinest faith.

‘It’s ever the noblest who most undervalue themselves,’ she said simply.

‘Oh, child, I have no nobility!’ he said, with a quick, impatient sigh. ‘If you knew me as I am you would hate me.’

‘I!’—it was only that one word she uttered, but in it there were all the glorious incredulity of a love which could never harbour credence of a stain on its idol, and—yet higher than this—the grandeur of a love which even if forced to condemn in judg-

ment, would only still cleave the closer in tenderness. He looked at her and was silent; he had not the heart—what man would have it?—to shatter that exquisite, pure, untroubled faith in him. Perhaps also he thought—

‘Almost thou makest me that which thou dost believe me.’

That night was the first night of ‘Githa.’ When the people came to its representation they were a little uneasy at the period in which the play was cast, and at the name of its author, which was of classic and scholarly repute. But the *grand art de plaire* had been long studied at this house; and a reassuring consolation had been prepared for them in a new drop-scene, which represented Dufresny in his Garden of Roses.

I do not suppose that many of them knew who Dufresny was: but the rose-garden was charmingly painted, and the handsome grandson of ‘la plus fraîche rose de mon parterre’ was in his court suit and his lace ruffles: and these we know—to those who don’t wear them—always seem suggestive of much elegance and amusement.

The play opened with a gorgeous festival scene, of the Saxon thanes with their purple peacock-

broidered robes, their harpists, their skins of wolf and bear, their golden chalices, their rough and riotous revelry. This charmed the assembled house as a mere spectacle, and when, later, Gladys swept across the stage, with her slow, soft, haughty grace, and her white, purple-bordered robe, and her dark, lustrous, grave eyes gazing from under the golden fringe of her hair, they were in no mood to grudge her one iota of the triumph she might win.

And that triumph was great. Until now she had been but a gifted actress of extreme youth, for whom high patronage and favouring circumstance had done so much that it was almost a question if they had not done all. But with this night they knew that by her voice genius alone had spoken.

When the first two acts were over, friends and critics pressed eagerly around her. She bent her head with a dreamy smile; she was too truly an artist not to shrink from the language of flattery when it jarred on the consecration of her thoughts, the passion of her art.

Beltran scarcely spoke: but when her eyes met his she had the only tribute, the only answer, for which she cared.

Dudley Moore addressed her almost with emotion.

‘You prove what none save fools—but many fools—doubt,’ he said to her. ‘You prove that the public can no more refuse to obey the influence of genius, than the tides can refuse to obey the laws of their flux and their re-flux.’

And he was right.

Breathed through her, shadowed forth by her, having in her all its vital yet spiritualized being, the vague dreams of the poet took life and became great. Interpreted by her voice, her eyes, her eloquence, her gestures, the shadowy fancy of the writer became a living creature, pure as the dew, generous as the sun, innocent as the blossom, grand as the tempest.

And the listless, ironical, surfeited, debased mental temper of the world of this your day was enthralled and subdued by an incarnation so unlike to itself, so far removed from its own narrowed passions and its own venal materialism ; and yet which had reality within it, because it had the greatness, the truth, and the divine fire which can be evoked from your human nature in its highest forms and in its noblest moments—which, indeed, are rare, and found only in

your impulses of heroism, in your hours of self-sacrifice, but yet, though thus rare, still are existent.

What is beyond all humanity ever fails to move it; it is the reason why all the religions of your earth are things of the lip, which scarcely influence the life: it is what remains human, yet is human only in the highest sense, and by the deepest woe, that can sway your hearts as the winds the reeds.

It is scarce too much to say that such a creation was this which the mind of the poet had conceived, and which the living power of the actress placed visibly before the dimmer eyes and the grosser intelligences of those who, without her, would have missed its meaning.

There were cold cynics there whose eyes were dim with tears; there were frivolous women there whose tongues were hushed and whose fans were still; there was a fashionable throng there that was forced to feel, that was compelled to honour, that forgot to be inane, and did not dare to cavil or to sneer.

Do you imagine that a corrupt age cannot revere, that an artificial age cannot be stirred by truth, that an abject age cannot rise to comprehension under

the compelling force of genius?—you are wrong to doubt. Was it not the vilest of the Pagan ages that gave credence, and foothold, and tenure, to the faiths and the philosophies of Paul?

Even as men are to the kine of the fields, so is genius to men:—when its eyes are on them they dare not refuse to obey, even if they obey in fear and in hatred. Stone it in the dark they will, indeed:—because men are oftentimes lower than the beasts of stall and sty.

When the end had come, and the pent-up emotions of the spectators had found their vent in tumults of applause, in thunders of homage, the triumph that she had won was no ephemeral glorification of a fair woman, but was the involuntary witness borne by a multitude to power that had vanquished it.

As she left the stage for the last time, the echoes of the vociferations that still called for her, from an audience never weary of beholding her, were yet resounding through the house. Her face was very pale; her eyes were heavy; on all her beauty there was a look of languor, of exhaustion, of profound sadness: the forces whereby genius moves the people ever recoil upon itself.

The story of the swan’s song in death may be a fable, doubtless ; yet it is true in allegory of the suffering wherefrom is drawn the melodies that thrill the souls of men.

She turned with almost a shudder of distaste from the congratulations around her.

‘Let me go away ; let me go home,’ she murmured to her friend as he stood by her. ‘I could not bear the laughter—the flattery—in the room to-night.’

He led her almost in silence from the house.

It was a still, clear, moonlight night ; above the narrow street on which the side-door opened the stars were shining ; it seemed strangely cool and calm after the crashing plaudits with which the theatre had re-echoed.

In that soft shadowy light her eyes met his. A quick shudder ran through him.

‘O God,’ he muttered half aloud, ‘that the world and I were worthier of you !’

A sigh stirred her lips as she answered him.

‘But for you what could the world have known of me ?—’

Her face was white as death ; her eyes were languid with fatigue ; the suffering which is ever the

tribute that genius pays for its sovereignty was upon her; but as the moonlight fell on her uncovered head, with the golden gleam of its hair, her loveliness was greater than in her proudest hours. He looked at her, then led her to her carriage; he paused a moment irresolute, then for the first time entered it also.

As he sank beside her, his hands touched hers; his lips sought hers; he drew her to his embrace in the first impulse of passion that had ever escaped him.

Quivering and mute, she rested in his arms, and hid her face upon his breast. The high courage, the poetic strength, the eloquent powers wherewith a moment earlier she had swayed the crowd, forsook her; and the woman whose divine gifts had held a multitude in servitude shrank weeping to him like a tired child.

The swift horses swept fast through the night, flying fleet as the moments.

In the silence I could hear the loud hard beating of his heart; in the dusky gleam of the lamp I could see that his eyelids were wet with tears.

Brokenly, breathlessly, she sobbed as a child sobs on its mother's bosom. The proud, passionate strength of a woman breaks ever thus into weak-

ness when the hour that needed the strength has passed by. He let it have its way, waiting patiently its exhaustion; but his arms pressed closer and closer around her, and his kisses burned upon her trembling lips.

When the carriage paused at length before her home, she broke from him, and fled swiftly through the leafy shadowy ways of her garden into the chambers of the house. He followed her rapidly into the little, fragrant, velvet-hung room that served her as a study.

The lights were burning low, the air was heavy with many flowers, the casements were still open to the balmy spring night.

She stood upon the hearth, her hands pressed upon her breast; her face now deathly pale, now flushing scarlet; her mouth quivering with swift breathless sighs, half terror and half rapture; her eyes dilated with startled fear, like a roused deer's, yet lustrous with an unutterable tenderness, an unutterable glory.

'Leave me! leave me!' she murmured brokenly. 'I am base in your sight—I am worthless—for ever!'

For to her pure lofty instinct, to her innocence

reared in simple stern creeds, which held honour a thing that a touch could attain, it seemed to her that he must have scorned her utterly ere ever he had sought her thus with the wildness of love: it seemed to her that because his kisses had burned thus on her, she must be debased in his eyes and her own for evermore. And yet with all this, beyond all this, there reigned over her her belief in him as the law of her life, the lurer of her fate, the saviour of her existence; and there stirred in her, imperious and exulting, the sweet, blind, tumultuous madness of the woman who loves and is loved.

He stood before her, silent: his face was dark with riotous passion held hard in curb, yet it was changed to a surpassing softness and reverence.

He stood silent awhile: how tempted, how assailed, his own heart alone ever knew.

Then his hands touched her and drew her to him, and his eyes gazed into hers.

‘But—as my wife?—’

Those brief broken words were all he said: it was his life, his honour, his world, the fame of his race, the repute of his name, that he gave her. Great gifts need slight phrase.



CHAPTER XIV.

SLAIN.



WITHIN a day or two from that time he married her, by those special laws which can be convened by gold.

In the humility of her intense love she had resisted him; she had pleaded that she was not worthy; she had entreated him to pause. But she could not withstand the force of his persuasion and the yielding of her own heart. And she became his wife.

Denzil and old Margett were the only witnesses of the marriage, and for awhile no others knew it. His fortune was so close to ruin, his affairs were so deeply entangled, that the declaration of such an

union at that moment was impossible. So—bitterly against his will—he let her remain on his stage awhile, and the town was left in ignorance of the relation that he bore to her.

Perhaps the tie had greater sweetness to them both because thus untold ; the ecstasies of passion seemed yet more exquisite because seized from the midst of the world's brilliancies and levities. When their eyes met across the crowded theatre, their secret was dearer because unprofaned by publicity ; when the laughter and gaiety of others were about them, their hearts thrilled at a chance word or a chance touch from each other, with purer rapture because their secret was unguessed.

Pshaw ! Why need I dwell on what no words can paint ?

They loved : they were undivided. In that brief phrase the uttermost passion of life's one perfect joy is told.

The hours fled apace. The spring grew into summer, and the summer grew languid with odorous heat. Three months drifted by ; months filled, for her, with colour, with melody, with public homage, with brilliant scenes of pleasure, with sweet, dreamy days in the heart of blossoming woods,

with hours of proud eloquence and lofty triumph, with the voluptuous trances of passion, and with the divine visions of love.

The last nights came, on which alone the public would ever behold her. With the height of summer the theatre closed: she loved the art which she followed; but his will was her law, and he had forbade her ever again to give the loveliness that was his to the eyes of a multitude. To go seaward awhile; to wander in those southern and eastern lands of which her bright fancy had dreamed; and, whilst absent, to let the knowledge of his marriage be given to the world, was the future he promised her: there were now but six nights left betwixt that promise and its fulfilment.

On one of those nights there came to the royal place in the theatre a woman who took her seat there as though she were in truth a sovereign, her bosom and her hair blazing with the deepest lustre of sapphires, her fan flashing thousands of small diamonds in the light each time it stirred; her great, slumbrous, brown eyes watching the stage incessantly with a scornful laughter just stealing under their heavy amorous lids. To and from her box there passed continually half the 'gilded youth' of

the town ; at the back of it, timidly hiding in the shadow like a chidden child, was a boy of ruddy cheek and simple air, who started now and again like a shy frightened hare : none noticed him ; all passed him ; he was her husband.

I shuddered as I saw : it was the same face that had glowed from the canvas of the Cléopâtre.

She spoke little : people would have said that she was devoted to the stage. She sat there almost motionless, gorgeous in the glare, nothing moving but those great dusky sleepy eyes, that glanced hither and thither over the house under their drooping lids.

Many present knew that her thoughts must be with the time when she, who sat there in her pomp and pride, had shown her half-nude beauty to the populace in the lowest pastime of the mime.

I alone knew that her thoughts might drift back to a still further season, when she who sat there, covered with jewels that were heirlooms, had envied the strolling players of the village-booth their spangles and their gewgaws.

Whenever Gladys was upon the stage this one gazer never withdrew her eyes from it, and they lost their laughter, and grew cold, intent, studious.

Wider contrast she could scarce behold to herself anywhere on earth. Perchance she felt it, for I saw her brow lower, and her red full lips tighten as though with a quicker drawn breath.

It might be that she felt—even as others did—that before this lofty, poëtic, soul-lit loveliness her own voluptuous splendour was hard, sensual, earthly: for, look up from the diamond to the planet, what will you then see of heaven in the gem?

For me, I trembled as I saw that baneful presence there.

Looking on her as she watched thus, I thought of a glittering, jewelled, ruby-orbed snake, reared motionless to watch the grace of a lithe-limbed, soft-eyed, and unconscious antelope—motionless, but ready to strike.

‘Did you see that woman’s eyes upon me?’ Gladys murmured as they drove homeward. ‘She whom they say was “Cléopâtre”?’

‘Yes, I saw them,’ he answered simply.

There were things in his life that he loathed,—now that he loved.

That night in her sleep she moaned with a restless fear and awoke trembling. ‘I dreamed of that woman!’ she cried, ‘of that woman!’

‘My love, my love,’ he murmured, ‘what can harm you, dreaming or waking, whilst I live?’

And she sighed softly, and fell asleep again on his heart,—content.

On the following night he did not come into the theatre as usual: she drove homeward immediately that the great play ended. She seemed anxious at his absence, the more so because she had not seen him since the noon of the day; and she sat awhile in her chamber, feeling sleepless and ill at ease.

The night was very hot; the casement stood wide open, looking out on to a mass of moonlit myrtle and syringa leaves; the heavy scents of dew-laden roses came up from the garden below; it was so still that all the starlit peace of some hill-sheltered country might have stretched around, rather than the countless roofs of a great city’s fashionable outskirts.

She sat beside the window; the white folds of some loose negligé floating about her; her rich hair lying on her shoulders, gleaming to a dusky gold in the low lamp-light; her throat and chest half bare as the wind stirred her dress; her eyes looking out on to the dark, dewy, still night, with those

dreams in them that only the happy dream. And her happiness was to her still a thing so breathless, so strange, so entrancing.

A church-clock somewhere without tolled midnight. As the last stroke sounded through the hot summer hush of the darkness, a man's step came up the stairs; the door opened, and he entered the chamber. She rose and went to him, with that beautiful flush and radiance which ever came on her face at his presence; and in his embrace there was a strange strength of passion rather like that of severance than of meeting.

'What has chanced?' she asked quickly, with the swift instinct of love, looking upward to his face, which had lost somewhat of its habitual colourlessness and calmness, and had warmth, and unrest, and almost eagerness upon it.

His eyes gleamed darker, and his lips quivered a little as he answered her:

'This, my love,—that I am rich once more!'

Her own eyes grew full of a tender surprise.

'Once more! But you have been so always, surely?'

He smiled.

'My child—I have been nearer to ruin than I

cared to tell you, or than I care to remember now. For some years past I have had the worst sort of poverty, Gladys,—the poverty of a man who has rank to uphold, and self-indulgence to satisfy, and who has dissipated his heritage in pleasures which have palled on him, though he cannot yet bring himself to break with them. I have been as near ruin as a man may be whose good name has not been lost or jeoparded. But there is no need to think of it now. I am rich once more. I can command the world for you!’

She looked at him still in wonder: to her he had ever seemed even as a god in power and in possession.

‘What is your joy, is mine. But for the world,—it is here for me,’ she answered him softly; and she pressed his hand to her breast, and bowed her head and rested her lips upon it.

He was silent; touched to passionate, dumb emotion; this man, whom his world believed indifferent to all tenderness, and callous to all devotion, felt a measureless gratitude to this creature who loved him for himself alone.

‘All other women I have known would have had but one thought—how much my riches may be!’

he muttered as he drew her to the couch beside the open casement, and sank down himself beside her.

‘How lovely you are!’ he murmured, as he moved back the heavy masses of her hair and watched the soft night wind stir amongst her dress, and drew her arms about him whilst he told the history of his new-born wealth.

The tidings had come but that day to him. A distant relative, old and childless, had left to him the whole accumulations of a penurious and solitary life; utterly unlooked for, undreamt of, because the dead man was of another branch of his family; one which had ever been at variance with the elder and loftier house. ‘Because he is the head of my race, and because he never sought me, noticed me, even knew me, therefore I bequeath, &c.,’ ran the strange testament; and the bequest was one, in lands and in gold, to place him amongst the richest and the most powerful of his Order.

To all men such sudden heritage is sweet; to him, at this moment, it was precious, far beyond its actual and social worth. He could not utter his thoughts to her, for he had never let the phantom of the world’s scorn come before her glad and

innocent eyes ; he had never let the shadow of the world's wrath fall across her sunlit, flower-sown path. But none the less himself did he know that it would need all the force of the fulcrum of wealth, all the massive weight of a great dignity and a great position, to compel from the world to her that world's honour without which both her life and his own would be poisoned and incomplete.

For, to the man who is proud and of pure lineage, it is not enough that he may know the innocence of his wife to be without soil ; it is as the very breath of his life, that it should be unassailable by living lie or by dead rumour, and unapproachable as the stars on high. And, sooner or later, the woman who learns that she has been suspected by the world will learn that, however deep her husband's love, or however imperishable his trust, there is one galled wound in his strength by which a passing touch can force his haughtiest pride to wince.

He knew this : she did not.

She could not comprehend the source of this vivid rejoicing which moved him at these tidings of his splendid inheritance ; but she rejoiced with him, in all the sweet instinctive sympathies of love.

And yet that humility, which is ever the companion of such love as hers, filled her with a vague sad sense of some unworthiness, of some unfitness, for such fortunes as his were.

‘Perhaps it is not well that I should be your wife?’ she said softly, whilst her face grew pale and her breath grew still, before that first shadow of a great unknown fear. ‘My people were poor and obscure; and I have followed a public art for gain; and when I cease to pursue it, as you desire, I shall have nothing of my own,—I should not have been your wife! There are so many women, great, beautiful, noble, worthy of your name: will you never wish that one of them—? I can only love you, I have nothing else to give!’

He stayed her words with his kisses.

‘Oh, child! Cannot you see that, with wealth and the world mine, such love is all, lacking, that I need? My God! how can I declare to you my pride in you? How shall I make you believe what greatness and what purity your genius, your loveliness, your nature, your mind, will bring to my race and my name? Stay but three days more, Gladys, and the world shall see in what estimate I hold these, in what honour I hold you.’

She sighed, with a deep content.

‘But will the world honour *you* for it?’ she asked him, with that dim and wistful sense of some unfitness in herself that had but newly touched her, and was still so shadowy and so slight.

‘It *shall*, my darling.’

In another hour the memory returned to her that, ere he answered her, he hesitated for a moment; and that, as he answered her, his eyes darkened and his brows contracted, as with the resolve to encounter, to compel, to vanquish.

But in that moment she only heard the [assurance given; she only felt the clasp of his arms and the touch of his lips.

She rested against him long in the deep, sweet, stillness of a joy, too sure and too perfect to be broken by words.

Once only she roused herself and spoke.

‘Shall I know your friends—your sister—then?’ she asked, with that happy light playing in her eyes, as she lifted them to his in the soft obscurity of the night.

‘I hope so, love.’

But I heard a short, impatient sigh from him as he spoke; and I knew that in his heart he was

full sure that never would his sister's hand take hers in welcome and in friendship.

He was silent some time, his touch absently caressing the thick and gleaming waves of her hair. He had too true a manhood in him, and too haughty a temper, not to be ready to proclaim his honour of her to the world with all widest and highest publicity, and not to feel, with passionate sincerity, that pride in her—in her innocence, and her loveliness, and her genius,—which he had avowed. But to every man it is bitter to know that the creature he delights to honour will be refused all honour by the world; to every man does it strike home, with a hateful pang, that the bearer of his name, the owner of his rank, the mother of his children, should be breathed on with the breath of libel and of imputed shame.

He knew the world too well not to fully appraise the cruel force of its incredulous contempt, its merciless censure; he had lived in it too long not to fully foresee the humiliations and insolences which it would be beyond all power of his to avert from the woman whom he loved. With time, indeed,—and riches,—he might be able to compel for her the lip homage of social respect, and to uncloset

for her the doors of the palaces of his order. But he knew that the work would be long,—toilsome,—and in the end but half accomplished.

For he knew that slander, having once seized on a fair name for its prey, does never altogether loose it; but, slumbering for a score of years, will yet, when it looks dead, have power still to lift its hydra head, and to spit poison. And so he sat there, thoughtful, weary, and half sad; yet with a thrill of old, dauntless, chivalric gladness in him, because to him it had now been given to show, at least in the world's sight, how high in honour he himself had held this life that trusted him with so supreme a faith.

Moreover, old aspirations stirred in him; old dreams arose.

Sitting there in the still summer night, with the light of the stars on the leafage without, and looking down into those deep, tender, soul-lit eyes, old fancies of his dead youth came to him. With gold, 'the compeller of men,' all things seemed possible to him. His wealth would be vast; his ambition might keep pace with it:—a lofty and pure ambition, seeking the welfare and not the suffrage of men: seeking to rule and not to use them.

Of pleasure he had known every sense and satiety ; of passion he had known every fury and folly ; of the world he had known every bitter and every beguilement ; a brief while ago his life had been tired, ruined, reckless, exhausted ; but now—now in this soft midnight hour of summer—the fair and noble dreams of his boyhood returned to him, and it seemed to him that to give them fruition yet lay in his gifts and his destinies.

‘ You are thinking ? ’ she said, looking up at him whilst her arms were about his neck. He smiled, and drooped his lips to hers.

‘ Yes. I am thinking of the future this day—and you—have given me.’

And I believe that those dreams abode with him in his slumber ; for ever and again I saw a smile come on his face, as he slept, where the moonlight fell in upon it through the dewy foliage that half hid the casement.

Ah God, that from some sleep men never awakened !

Early on the morrow he left her, compelled by some exigencies of his new possessions to be absent in the north two days.

There were but three nights more of her public career. He would fain have shortened even these ; but the interests of many were involved, and with the true soul of the artist in her, she parted from her world of art with pain and almost with unwillingness ; and she clung to these few remaining hours in which alone the genius in her would ever utter itself to the multitude, and feel and use its powers.

He feared that it would be impossible for him to return before midnight of the second day at earliest. He left her with singular reluctance, with longing regret, even for so short an absence.

Towards the close of that day she sat alone in her little library ; without there was all the glow of a summer evening at seven o'clock, but within the violet hues of the room seemed like twilight. She sat lost in thought ; a smile and a flush now and then crossing her face at some memory ; her book had fallen to the floor ; her head was bent ; in her bosom some little scarlet love-roses were fastened.

She did not hear the sound of steps without ; she did not even hear the soft slow unclosing of the door, and the sweep of a woman's robes over the velvet of the floor. Lost in thought, the deep,

sweet, visionary thought of a love that is half-earthly, half-divine, she did not even feel that she was no more alone.

The woman paused and looked at her, herself unseen. Her great, brown, slumbrous eyes glittered like jewels; her ruby mouth curled with a cruel scorn; her teeth set slightly, like an animal about to spring. I knew her—thus had I seen her, though then obscure of beauty as a diamond still dull in its bed of quartz, look thirstily on the tawdry treasury of the pedler's pack; thus had I seen her in all the haughty insolence of her shameful pomp when she had sat in her amber-hung case-ment, and mocked the poor, lowly, stainless life whose innocence and sublimity offended her.

She stood quite still, looking, looking, with the heavy lids dropped over her eyes; she was attired for some festival of the coming night; jewels glanced at every point upon her; a gold-hued, tropical bird was fastened against her breast, in its beak a flower of diamonds; with that scorn upon her mouth, with that gleam beneath her lids, with some gold-hued tissue, light as mist, about her, she seemed to me to burn with an insufferable brilliancy through the dusk as a tiger's eyeballs may flame

through the darkness of an eastern night.

Suddenly Gladys felt, rather than heard or saw ; felt that she was watched, and was no more in solitude ; she started, turned her head, and sprang to her feet, erect.

For the moment she was speechless in surprise ; for the moment this woman's face was strange to her, telling no tale, bringing no history.

Avice Dare smiled where she stood. She had come unannounced, unaccompanied ; admitted doubtless through some bribe of her gold, or some awe that her rank carried with it.

'You know me ?' she said carelessly, 'I know you. We are both on the world's stage.'

Gladys gazed at her, still silent with amaze ; remembrance of the sole history that she had heard tangled with this woman's name returning slowly through the confusion of her shattered thoughts.

'I know you thus much,' she answered, her clear pure tones striking across the harsh voice of her questioner as the note of a silver bell may strike across the dissonant clangour of brazen cymbals. 'Thus much,—that your presence only is a dishonour. Why do you bring it hither ?'

Avice Dare laughed aloud, with caustic insolent

ease, and for answer sank on to a couch by the hearth, and leaned her elbow on her knee, her chin upon her hand, in indolent action of familiarity.

‘Dishonour? are you a fool? I am what all women would give their lives and their souls to be,—now. I came to look at you,—stand more to the light,—so! you are handsome enough!’

Gladys stood erect upon her own hearth, the last glow of the sunset falling upon her; her hand rested on the marble shelf, her eyes were dilated with a deepening amazement half touched with loathing and with fear.

She deemed this woman mad.

‘Whatever be your errand,—say it and depart,’ she made answer. ‘Though you now were an empress, not less should I hold your life infamy.’

Avice Dare laughed once more; with one hand she played with the diamond in the mouth of the bird, on the other she rested her chin whilst her slumbrous, ruthless glances searched out every trait of face and of form, of limb and of feature, in the living loveliness that faced her.

‘My errand is to look at you,’ she said curtly. ‘Well, you are beautiful, though not in my fashion. You are a genius, they say. What use is that? I had

only good looks, and see where I am ! Genius ? Pshaw ! what do *they* care for that ? If you were an ill-favoured wench, though you had all the genius of heaven and hell, what would it serve you ? You might die in a gutter.'

The voice of Gladys, with its proud serene utterance, rang again across hers :

'Do you come here to tell me this ? It was not worth while. I know nothing of you, save that you have been one who destroyed the lives and the souls of men ; I desire to know no more. I only bid you go.'

Avice Dare laughed aloud ; her eyes glittered with a more sinister and savage meaning under the weight of their blue-veined languid lids.

'Destroy the lives and souls of men—know no more of me than that ! Pshaw ! what is that more than to know me—a woman ? You speak fine and fair. I never did either. I am a dullard at their arts and their learning. But I am no such fool but what I think,—sometimes. I think what fools and what beasts they are : maddened by the red of our lips and the white of our skins ; ready to sell themselves to any devil, if we will only be theirs when they craze for us ; flinging away all their gold,

and their youth, and their good repute, that we may spurn them, or kick them, or kill them as our choice goes. I do think,—sometimes. I think what fools and what beasts they are. There is your lover—he was mine once.’

The face of Gladys grew suddenly white as death; she pressed one hand to her heart unconsciously, crushing the roses.

‘Will you go?’ she said, calmly still, whilst her teeth were tight shut. ‘Or will you force me to summon my servants?’

Avice Dare bent forward, the golden bird glowing brighter, the diamond in his mouth shining with rosier light, the laugh in her eyes growing broader and coarser.

‘Call whom you like. It is no news to the town, if it be news to you. It was only when I left him—left him because he was well-nigh a beggar, and had dared to taunt me for having no talent—it was only then that he gave his theatre to you.’

‘His!’

She echoed the word unconsciously in the stupor of amaze with which this woman’s words had stifled her. Some vague shape of some hideous truth,

that loomed out from the gloom of hidden years, was all she had vision left to see.

‘His,—surely his,—what of that?’ retorted the sullen, scoffing, victorious voice, which in its moments of passion lost all the finer and purer accent of tuition, and lapsed into the rude and homely words of its birth-tongue. ‘*His* theatre! You knew that well enow. It have always been his toy, to set up his fancy of the hour in, and make the gabies of the world run and stare to see a thing of wonder in his mistress. He’s had it now a many year; and he’ve never had one as good in it as me, though he chose to dare and jibe me, and to say as I could only do the dancing. You were a girl he found in the streets, I’ve heard?—selling flowers and starving? And you’d a pretty face, and he took a liking to it; and he made a—lady—of you? It’s his way; and it pays too. Naught draws like a handsome face to the stage. You are an artist, they say, and God knows what: I never did naught but dress and dance. But the town was as mad about me as you. So was he. I pillaged him pretty well; but they do say as how you have ruined him out-and-out. A playhouse is a pretty toy enough; but it beggars men quick—when we

help too! You live very quiet, and proud, and innocent-like, they say. Well, it seems to pay you high that way; but you chose to talk about "infamy" a second ago. Now, I have been honest, at least: while you—'

Her laugh filled up the pause; more brutally than by jest or jibe.

Gladys stood erect; her hand clenched on the marble; her face blanched with a mute breathless disgust; her lips dumb in her own defence. An unutterable horror had seized her: in one instant all the truth, so long screened from her with such tender hands, was laid bare to her sight as the flash of the lightning lays bare the abyss.

For the moment she was speechless; her heart beat with a slow sickening effort that seemed to drain all strength from her limbs and all life from her veins; her eyes lost sight; her ears lost sound; a deadly faintness held her in its bonds.

Avice Dare watched her with a sleepy voluptuous cruel pleasure; even as in the old time gone I had seen her watch the lingering torture of a high-couraged, luminous-eyed falcon, caught in a trap in a green beechen bough, and struggling passionately for freedom, all through the hours of a burning

thirsty summer-day, till death released it.

‘Your eyes look strange : is this news to you ?’ she said coldly. ‘Ignorance is odd enough, surely. If it is not his gold that you live on, whose is it ? Does gold grow, like your roses ? You were a beggar, without bread, without home, without a hope in the world ; yet when you were lifted up into riches and ease you never asked whence the wealth came that did it ! Faugh ! what liar durst tell any baby such a fable as that ?’

The foul word roused her hearer like a dagger’s thrust ; the sickly faintness passed away ; the blood rushed to her face in a bright passionate flood ; her eyes flashed fire ; her whole form grew instinct once more with strength and gracious pride.

‘Silence ! Silence !’ she cried, with calm contemptuous command. ‘What my life is, matters not to you. It cannot come for judgment to your vile imaginings. Go, and let me forget, if I can, that lips so foul as yours have ever dared to breathe to me the name I honour only second to my God’s.’

For one moment the low brutal nature of her antagonist was awed and cowed before the grandeur of that noble simplicity, the purity of that perfect faith ; for one moment she, in whom

womanhood was but a base and venal infamy, saw by one fleeting vision how great by the divinity of love can womanhood become.

With the next instant, the evil in her scoffed to scorn that one relenting impulse.

It has been written that there is not one man without some gleam of tenderness and pity; it is not written that there is not one woman.

Her dusky sleepy eyes flashed with a sudden stupid wonder.

‘Is it true?’ she said curtly.—‘True, as some say of late, that you be his wife?’

Gladys answered nothing; but her face spoke. Where she stood, with her hands crossed upon her breast and her eyes gazing against the sunset light, there was more eloquence than lies in words in that fearless dignity, in that conscious gladness and glory of a life which knew itself one with his for ever.

Avise Dare laughed aloud, gnawing with her ruby lip the diamond which the bird bore.

‘So-ho! you have done worse by him than ever I did!’ she cried, her hard exultant voice ringing through the soft sweet silence of the chamber; ‘I have done it by another, it’s true. But *my*

dupe is a witless lad, too great a fool to know what honour is. But yours!—Nay, hear me out. I have little to say; but I'll say that. I know him right well; he's a fool in his gifts, and a devil in his pride. Like enow you've drawn him on to give you even his name, out of pity. But maybe you've never thought how you've killed his pride in him for ever and aye. Do you know that the women of his rank would no more come nigh you than nigh me? Do you know that his world will say he has married his mistress, and that your sons will be taught, soon or late, to blush for their mother? Do you know that to live with you he must give up his order? and that, though you may carry its title, you will never pierce into its ranks? I tell you the truth: I've done the like myself. But I'm a "vile woman," you know; you,—you're an angel of innocence! Well, you may be; you've a fair face, I see; and you hold yourself rarely and loyally. But, look you here. When, through you, he is the scorn of friends and the jest of fools; when for you he gives up his old world, and his own race; when by you he has children who can be taunted by schoolmates with your name; when for you he lives beggared, restless, half obscure,

shunning the eyes of the world because of the stain the world thinks that it sees on his scutcheon, *then* he will find little choice, I fancy, between my "infamy" and your "innocence." You are his wife, no doubt; your eyes say so, though you stand dumb. Well, he will never tell it to you, because he is a gentleman born; but as sure as he lives, so sure will the day come when in his soul he will curse you for the selfishness that you cloaked in purity, for the cruelty that you masked in love. I am a bad woman—yes—but I was never so base to him as you! I only took his gold; I never stole his name!

Then, without another word, she passed across the chamber; the gleam of her golden tissues flashing on the gloom.

On the threshold she paused one moment, the brutal smile gleaming on her full red lips:

'We go to see you act to-night: you will scarce be at your greatest, I fancy!'

And the door closed on her slow hard mockery of joyless laughter.

Gladys stood erect on her own hearth. A mute, breathless, numbing horror stole over her face, and blasted the light from her eyes, and drained the life

from her veins. She gave no cry, no sign ; she did not move ; her eyes still looked out steadfast at the light, and yet—ah God !—to see that horror in her face was to behold death seize a living, happy, sinless creature in the first fair radiance of its beauty, in the first sweet summer of its years !

* * * * *

Eight of the evening chimed softly through the silence. It was the season when the world claimed her. She had flung herself on her knees beside her couch ; and still kneeled there with her head bowed upon her arms, though more than an hour had drifted by since the words of her destroyer had echoed through the stillness of that peaceful place. At the sound of the chimes she started, and rose to her feet ; she was white as marble ; her breath came in slow, agonized labour ; her eyes had a bewildered, tearless terror in them.

So brief a while before, a rapture so perfect had environed her ; a passion so shadowless had entranced her ; and now,—the whole force of a hideous truth was round her like a web of fire.

She knew that in the world's sight she was a thing dishonoured ; and that the reflex of such dishonour was the sole dower that she had brought her husband.

‘To have harmed him—to have harmed him. Oh, my God!’ That was the sole cry that was wrung from her. Before her sight, like an abyss on which the lightning plays, there spread all the depths of infamy on which she, unwitting, had stood in joyous ignorance so long, and all the undreamt-of wealth of pity, tenderness, and countless gifts that she had owed to him.

All things were bared before her: she saw herself the creature of his alms, the beggar enriched by his mercy, the debtor kept in blindness because vision would have shown her all her debt. She knew now why all the women of his race had held aloof from her; she knew now why the assurance of the world’s honour had hesitated on his lips, and his promise of it been, not confidence, but defiance. Even in her ignorance—even when she had deemed herself the creatrix of her fame, and the gainer of her gold,—she had said ever in her soul, ‘What shall I render thee, O princely giver?’ deeming that the world could never hold fit payment to him. But now—now—she beheld the past in all its nakedness; and now she knew likewise that her only recompense to him was to take to him, in marriage, the imputed shame

wherewith the world had laden her ! With all the sweeping cruelty of bitterest truth, the words of her enemy had scourged her, till they cut the living flesh of her bared heart.

Without a thought that was regret, without a dream that was fear, without a vision of dishonour that could ever taint her, of repentance that could ever assail her, she had lived her radiant life until this hour. And now—now—she knew that though she should live to the extremest years of age she could never undo the evil wherewith she had paid him back his good.

Baser and more self-steeped natures would but have seen that, come what would, her own place as his wife was beyond challenge and beyond change. But to her the knowledge that the wrong wrought to him could never be undone, though ever so passionately he should crave his freedom, though ever so wearily he should lament his loss, was an agony greater than any woe or martyrdom she could herself have borne.

‘ If only he were still free ! ’ she cried aloud in her torture. ‘ If only I could be his servant—his mistress—his dog—so that the world should honour him still ! ’

For to her, in the deep humility of her passionate gratitude, it seemed that there was nought in herself to recompense him for his surrender to her of his honour and his troth: to her, in the high, pure, stainless, creeds of her old grave poetic race, it seemed that to have lived upon his gold, though all unwittingly, and to have been libelled by his world, though all unrightfully, took from her for ever all fitness to the place and to the name of his wife.

She was but a child, still; she was a poet, she had the pride of lofty creeds, she had the self-abandonment of a love that was absolute in its idolatry; she saw nothing, felt nothing, heeded nothing, save that she was shameful in the sight of the world, and that she had paid a measureless debt only by acceptance of as measureless a sacrifice!

One thought only folded her in its poisonous net, as the fire folded Glauce. The thought that she had dishonoured him—dishonoured him!—she, who would have given up her young life to any torture or to any death, to spare to him one moment's pang, to save to him one breath of scorn!

It may be, that if in this hour his voice had fallen on her ear, his kiss had touched her lips, this

paroxysm might have passed, this horror might have unloosed her. But he was absent : there were none near to counsel or to soothe : she was alone with all this brutal truth that rose before her, all this sense of irrevocable ruin brought on him by her love.

And in such an hour she could not reason : she could only suffer :—suffer those tortures of hell which on earth only come to the innocent.

* * * * *

The eighth hour sounded.

She started to her feet. She knew that the public waited her.

‘ Oh God ! I cannot go ! ’ she murmured, ‘ I cannot ! ’

Her head fell on her breast ; her white lips gasped for air ; the crushed roses fell to the ground, —dead.

But that moment passed. She had the courage of the soldier ; the endurance of the martyr. Such women have. It was the fulfilling of his appointed place ; it was the execution of his appointed duty.

On a side-table near there stood a flask of rich amber-tinted wine, that he had left there in the early day. By sheer instinct she poured it forth, and took deep draughts of it ; it was rarely that

she ever touched wine ; its stimulant revived the warmth in her veins, quickened the dull uncertain beating of her heart, restored her for the hour to strength and consciousness.

‘ She shall not see me fail,’ she muttered in her teeth. ‘ She shall see what force his love and honour give.’

Then she rang, and bade them tell her people she was ready, and went, with a calm step and all her old grace of bearing, to the carriage that already waited at the accustomed hour. I followed her : she was not sensible of my presence.

The horses flew like the wind ; it was already late ; I looked up at her face in fear and trembling : it might have been cut in marble, it was so still, so fixed, so colourless. Her eyes still held that look of breathless pain, and her heart beat so loudly that I could hear the throb of its heavy and irregular pulse above the sound of the horses’ hoofs, and all the manifold and confused noises of the busy streets.

The simple gold of the marriage ring was hidden under a weight of other jewelled circles on her slender hand ; she drew the jewels from it, and looked at it with a strange passion, half glory and half horror.

It was the sign of her honour amidst women, it was true ; but none the less did it seem to her the sign of his bondage, of his sacrifice, of his degradation in the sight of the world.

‘ They must not know : they must never know,’ she murmured ; and she put back over it the gemmed rings that screened it from others’ eyes.

What she would do in the future she knew not ; she only vaguely felt that never, by the derision of the world for him, should the honour of the world be purchased for herself.

The carriage flew through the lighted town, in which the glare of the gas crossed the lingering light of the glad summer evening.

It paused before the familiar place where the world waited for her.

‘ If they see that I suffer, they will say evil of him,’ she muttered half aloud ; and the meditative calm came back into her eyes ; her colourless mouth wore a proud resolve ; her head was lifted with a haughty grace : as she passed the people in the passage to go onward to her dressing chamber, I heard one stranger say to another :—‘ Is that fair-haired woman the actress ? Heavens ! — she might be an empress by her look !’

It was later than the appointed hour ; the house called for her, growing impatient ; there was not a moment to be lost. She robed herself hastily, and swept on to the stage with slow, graceful, negligent dignity, whilst the homage of the crowded theatre rang out again and again in their acclamations of welcome.

She looked once at the house : there, true to her word, her enemy was throned ; seated laughing amidst her courtiers, as Faustina sat beneath the purple canopy of the Antonines to watch the gladiatorial show upon the blood-steeped sands below.

The amber tissues glowed around her, till she seemed bathed in light, and the golden bird in her bosom held his diamond in the light, as though in symbol of the sole wage for which the wise amidst womanhood sell love.

Her eyes met those of Gladys ; they were full of the same merciless exultation, of the same sleepy, brutal, and voluptuous pleasure. As the noble courser answers to the barbed cruelty of the spur, so did the high courage of the creature that she tortured answer to that tigress' glance. The blood flushed to her face ; strength rang in her voice ; eloquence and inspiration returned to her.

She played with yet more consummate art, with yet more dauntless genius, than the world had ever beheld in her. For she played to justify his love ; she played to save his honour ; she played, not for the world, but him.

I felt a strange fear as I watched her : I knew not why.

It seemed to me that the force of her self-command was too great, the fever of her strength too high, for the victory not to cost her some fatal price ere it should utterly be won.

And—at those times when she was no more in the public sight, but waited in the solitude of her chamber, my terror grew : for that deathlike whiteness of her face never changed, and I could see and hear the laboured beating of her heart, as though the youth and vital gladness of its pulse were crushed and suffocated beneath the weight of deadly knowledge.

Yet still she moved with a grace so exquisite, with a power so matchless, before the assembled multitude ! She held them entranced as even she had never held them. When their cries rang to the roof, they were no empty or careless homage, but the tumultuous fury of a people moved to passionate

and rapturous emotions. And where her enemy sat, with the golden bird nestled in her bosom, and the brutal triumph in her eyes, the eyes glanced with furtive doubt, and the wicked lips curled with an uneasy smile—her prey escaped her; her hate lost its sting.

The end drew near; the strain was well-nigh over.

As she went once more before the sight of the people I knew that the ordeal would soon be passed, the victory be soon accomplished, if—if—she had strength to endure to the last.

She went: and the echoes of the public acclamations greeting her again rolled in their muffled thunder on my ear where I waited in the loneliness of her little chamber.

Suddenly the door unclosed: Beltran himself entered. His return had been earlier than he had deemed possible.

He glanced round the empty place, and left it hurriedly: I heard his step die away down the long corridors which led to the public portion of the house.

I went forth from the chamber, and stole to that familiar corner where I so often had tarried

to watch the play of the stage, and the crowds of the house. He, I saw, had passed amidst the audience, and was standing in his sister's box with his head bent to her. The theatre was hushed into intense stillness; some woman's sob, some man's deep-drawn breath, alone quivered on the silence; the listening multitude was held in that trance of sympathy in which genius can hold a world at will.

She was alone upon the stage: it was that supreme moment in the tragedy wherein the woman, whom she portrayed, learned that the love which she had deemed divine as heaven was but a thing of desolation and dishonour.

She stood erect, her hands crossed on her breast, the white folds falling about her limbs; the gleam of her hair like light above her brow; her eyes gazing out upon the upturned faces of the crowd beneath her feet with a mute blind anguish which chilled them as though they looked on death.

Her voice thrilled through the house with a strange, sweet, unutterable passion in it that brought tears to the eyes of those who heard—all meaning of the verse she spoke was lost to them, they only felt the meaning of that music of the voice, sad as the last sigh of a dying child, passionate as the last look

of love in eyes that never more will meet on earth.

One alone in all that vast audience—one alone, her destroyer—knew what memories were in her thoughts, what truth was in her utterance, as the words of the poet left her lips :

‘ I thought to give him honour,
Liberty, fealty, peace,—and all fair things
That make men’s lives divine. And, lo !
The only dower that I take is shame.
My arms entwining him will sap his strength,
My kiss beget disgrace on him. My love—
The only gift I ever had to give—will be
Dishonour and corruption in men’s sight.
The harlot’s jeer, the hired jester’s jibe,
And all the mockery and malison of tongues,
Will now hoot at him, and drag down his name
Through the foul mire of their public ways.
And I—I—I, his slave, his love, his wife,
Shall take him moral death and endless infamy.
Ah God !——’

The breath paused on her lips ; the words were broken and ceased ; her gaze had fallen upon him where he stood amidst the women of his order in the centre of the lighted house, and in that one moment of sudden recognition the world about her died from her sight, and all she saw were those eyes, familiar and beloved, that smiled on her.

Her strength snapped like a bow overstrung.

Her senses sickened and grew dull. With a faint cry she stretched her arms out to him, and reeled, and fell.

The curtain sank, and hid her from the public sight. Through the tumult of the panic-stricken multitude there ran the awe of one dread murmur ; —‘ death.’

In one moment he was beside her ; he scattered the people like sheep ; he seized her in his arms, and bore her through the open doors of the supper-chamber where in other years the boy-statesman had fallen dead upon the hearth because a woman, vile of soul, had kissed him, and betrayed him.

Some fled in terror to seek succour ; others huddled in terror on the threshold ; about him his friends gathered, helpless, horrified, aghast, afraid.

He never spoke ; but as he laid her down and threw himself beside her, he tore aside the lace and linen off her bosom, and sought to feel and listen for the beating of her heart.

Its pulse was still.

He flung himself upon her ; he called her name with every caress of words that passion holds ; he covered with his kisses her lips, her bosom, her limbs ; he crushed her in his arms as though in his

horror he could seize her and withhold her from the brutal ravishing of death.

The warmth of that burning embrace, the fire of those quivering lips, gave back for one fleeting moment a pang of movement to the numbed and strengthless heart; gave back a flush and glow of life to the languor and the coldness of the feeble blood.

Her eyes unclosed, and looked at him with that perfect love which never again on earth would come to him.

‘The world need never know it—now,’ she murmured. ‘Kiss me once more—oh God! oh love! forgive!’—

And with that prayer for pardon on her sinless lips, she feebly turned, and wound her arms about his neck, and drooped her head upon his breast, and sought his lips with hers.

In that last kiss, her last breath fled.

He, who so long had known no grief, and smiled at every pang, grew like a madman in his agony: he drove forth from the chamber every human creature, and barred the door upon them, and spent

the watches of the night alone—alone save for that beautiful dead thing that he had loved ; alone, save for the gold of the heavy hair, for the calm of the closed eyes, for the caress of the lifeless lips, which stirred no more beneath his own, for the loveliness of the cold limbs and of the pulseless breast which thrilled and flushed no more beneath his touch.

All through that night I saw the deadliest sight that the world holds ;—the despair of a strong man.

When, with the full light of day, his friends broke into the room, in terror at the silence that had lasted there from midnight unto noon, they found him stretched upon the hearth ; his head upon her chest, his hands clenched in her loose hair, the full sun falling on her fair dead face, and through the festal chamber of so many nights of mirth.

When they raised him they saw that her breast and hair were stained and wet and red—he had ruptured a blood-vessel, the dark stream had gushed from his throat and mouth, and he was senseless.



CHAPTER XV.

VALETE.

I have not heart in me to dictate more.

There are many things that I thought to chronicle. I have many adventures left untold, many portraits left unsketched, many memories left unrecorded. But I have not the heart in me to tell more now; and, besides,—I am only to fill a certain number of pages.

Strange generation!—which has its literature measured like its yards of Coventry ribbon, or its pounds of Cambridge butter! I suppose, however, that it is a good thing that there is some such ruthless restriction, for, Heaven knows, without it poets or autobiographers might spin on at the wheel of

their vanity for ever : for the thread of Amour Propre is a thread without an end, and tough as it is endless. In vain do the world's sharp scissors of scorn snap at it and cry ' Hold, enough ! '—the thread is of stuff indestructible, and it only thinks that the scissors are jealous !

Since that awful night I have never quitted Beltran.

His life was long in jeopardy ; but with time his strength prevailed. Those who care not for life commonly have life cling to them.

He never knew the truth of that early death. Men of science agreed in their judgment that her heart had been long feeble of action, and at length had suddenly given way ; it is a disease not rare with those of vivid mind and delicate frame.

There was no one—nothing—which could reveal to him the secret of Avice Dare. For I could not bear witness against her.

Gladys' grave was made in the old green country of his birth, amidst the sepulchres of his ancient and stately race. This honour was all left for him to yield to her. By that grave the world learned that she had been his wife during that one, sweet, short, summer-time.

One day I saw Dudley Moore stand by that simple tomb, almost hidden in the white blossom of roses, and his hard, cynical, keen eyes were dim with tears, the first that had ever dimmed them since they had seen the light.

From that night the theatre was closed. It can never more bring ruin to any, or echo with the laughter of a crowd. It has been razed to the ground, and on its site stands a poor-house.

Beltran does not heed that I am near. But I can watch him, follow him, guard him in his sleep—it is enough.

I ask no more. I am only a dog—I dare to love, I dare not even seek to be loved in answer.

Ah! when your poets have painted the fidelity of woman, they have found its likeness on earth, perhaps—in their dog.

He leads the old life in the world. Why not? If all men in whose hearts lives a dull, abiding grief, whose throbs death and death only ever will still, deserted for desert or ocean your world of fame and of fashion, how strangely that world would look! How much eloquence would be dumb in your senatorial chambers; how many a smile would be missing from your ball-rooms and hunting-fields;

how many a frank laugh would die off for ever from your ear; how many a well-known face would vanish from your clubs, from your park, from your dinner-tables, from your race-stands!

And how seldom would it be those that you had pitied who would go!—how often would the vacant place be that place where so many seasons through you had seen, and had envied, the gayest, the coldest, the most lighthearted, the most cynical amongst you!

Ah! let Society be thankful that men in their bitterness do not now fly as of old to monastery or to hermitage; for, did they do so, Society would send forth her gilded cards to the wilderness.

He lives the old life in the old world still. He could not dare to trust himself to solitude. Solitude!—sweet to the youth who first suffers; to the poet who finds in his thorn crown his aureole; to the lover who is half enamoured and half proud of the pangs that devour him; sweet to those. But to the man of the world, to the man past his youth, to the man whose last hope is dead with his last joy and last passion—solitude would be but the gate of the mad-house.

He is in the world,—of the world; the great for-

tunes that have come to him bring the world about his feet. The man who is nobly born, and lately enriched, can have of the world what he will—except happiness.

‘He is a man without a heart!’ I heard a mother murmur, whose daughter he would not woo. ‘A man without a heart, and he has never loved. There was a beautiful young actress—his wife, we learned later, whom he had driven into public life to maintain himself in the days of his ruin,—and she died on his own stage from his cruelty; and look! how utterly he has forgotten her now!’

Forgotten her! Heartless!

When they—they who are many as the woes and sins of the earth are many—whom he seeks out with unceasing patience, in their manifold sufferings, their innumerable needs, look up in his weary passionless eyes, and bless him for aid, for bread, for existence itself, given to them by a mercy which the world never dreams of,—they know whether he is heartless.

When, in the stillness and darkness of dawn I watch him pace his chamber, sleepless and haunted by a ghost that will not leave him with the rising of the sun that day, or any day, in all the

years to come,—when I see him fling himself upon his bed as the morning light streams in, and see him writhe in his agony, whilst the great tearless sobs shake his frame in the torture of a memory that can never die while he has life—I know how he has forgotten.

Well,—it boots little to dwell on this.

A '*vie manquée* !' says the world, when it speaks of him, recalling the old fair promise of the talents of his youth.

Is there any threnody over a death, half so unutterably sad as that one jest over a life ?

'*Manquée* !'—the world has no mercy on a hand that has thrown the die and has lost ; no tolerance for the player who, holding fine cards, will not play them by the rules of the game. '*Manquée* !' the world says, with a polite sneer, of the lives in which it beholds no blazoned achievement, no public success.

And yet,—if it were keener of sight, it might see that those lives, not seldom, may seem to have missed of their mark, because their aim was high over the heads of the multitude ; or because the arrow was sped by too eager a hand in too rash a youth, and the bow lies unstrung in that hand when matured. It might see that those lives which

look so lost, so purposeless, so barren of attainment, so devoid of object or fruition, have sometimes nobler deeds in them and purer sacrifice than lies in the home-range of its own narrowed vision. 'Manquée!'—do not cast that stone idly: 'how shall you tell, as you look on the course of a life that seems to you a failure, because you do not hear its 'Io triumphe' on the lips of a crowd, what sweet dead dreams, what noble vain desires, what weariness of futile longing, what conscious waste of vanished years—nay, what silent arts of pure nobility, what secret treasures of unfathomed love,—may lie within that which seems in your sight even as a waste land untilled, as a fire burnt out, as a harp without chords, as a bird without song.

There are but three more things that I will tell you—now.

In the springtime of this year I was in Paris. It was a beautiful brilliant night in the height of April. The chesnuts were full of bloom; the air was full of fragrance; there were a million stars above and a million lamps below; lilacs and hyacinths filled the balconies and casements; there was the sound

of music and of laughter everywhere.

I was curled on a satin cushion in one of the supper chambers of a great gilded house, where all that is lavish, and brilliant, and dissolute in the city is wont to come. My friends had come thither after the opera ; one of their guests was a great actress, with a wondrous dark beauty, and the luminous eyes of the East : a woman of many passions, of many follies, of many talents, of many caprices, yet of many virtues ; a woman whom they called always *Mariquità*.

After a while, the supper ended, she moved a little away from the table and went out on to the balcony and sat there, leaning her arm on the gilded rail, and glancing at the crowds that stirred beneath the boughs below. One man followed her and sat there too, away from the laughter and glitter within, in the cool of the night, amongst the white and purple hyacinths that filled the place, and with the quiet stars above.

It was very still there : it was late in the night, and the street beneath was scarcely seen for the leaves of the limes and the hyacinth blossoms.

‘ You do not love me, Denzil,’ she said suddenly, when she leaned in the shadow with her diamonds

gleaming as they caught the rays of the moon.

He answered her simply, 'No.'

She looked at him with a curious, steadfast, dreaming look; whether she loved him or not I never knew. They played at love together.

'You are frank!' she said at last with a smile, 'and you are very singular!'

'No doubt. But you may as well know it—years ago I loved one woman so well that I never shall love another.'

'Ah! how like a man! you can never love; and yet,—you have a thousand passions!'

He flung his cigarette into the street.

'What has that to do with it? Nothing!'

She watched him curiously awhile.

'Where is she?' she asked at length.

'God knows! If I knew do you think I should be *here*?'

The dark magnificence of her face paled under all the scorn of the answer uttered. She was used to have the world at her feet, and the passions of men at her will.

She was quiet long: then she spoke.

'Listen, Denzil, you write stories that the world reads; I will tell you one that the world never knew.'

He listened listlessly, leaning against the balcony; wearily watching the ebb and the flow of the street-crowd beneath, under the linden boughs. From within there echoed the noisy laughter and the banal wit;—out here the stars were shining.

She told him the story; it was one that I had known. He heard indifferently, striking alight another cigar, with his handsome dark head bent down in the moonlight.

When she had told it, she drew a little amulet-case from her bosom; an old worn leathern thing, though hung on to a necklace of onyx. The same case into which I had once seen placed the fragment of the paper that she had found in the death-chamber in the Quarter of the Poor.

‘Here is the letter,’ she said, taking out of it a folded sheet, torn. ‘I never showed it to any before. I do not know why I do to you. Only—see how women love.’

He took it indifferently still; but as he saw the writing, he started and he grew deadly pale: he read it by the white clear moonlight, read it to the end. And as she watched him she trembled and was afraid: she, the famous and fearless and reckless woman, was afraid, with a terrible fear,

of this memory that she unwittingly had wakened.

She seized his arm in terror.

‘ Oh God ! what have I done ? ’

He looked at her with a look that she will never till her dying day forget, though she live to the extremest years of age.

‘ Done, done ? Nothing that I know, only—it was I who loved her ! ’

The laughter echoed from the supper-room, the sounds of music floated on the air ; through the open window the lights of the chamber glowed ; beneath the leaves the crowds were passing to and fro ; from within the gay outcries of the women of pleasure challenged his return : and he stood there in the moonlight with the letter in his hands, only hearing a voice for ever silent, only seeing a face for ever gone.

And thus the dying words of Gertrude D'Eyncourt came to him at the last.

A little while later, more in the summer-time, leaving Paris itself, we tarried a brief while in one of those charming places in its precincts that lie hidden in those woods which still seem to echo with

the careless laughter, and breathe out the amber perfume, and murmur with the mocking love, of the dead *Regne Galant*.

I was left entirely to myself, and wandered as I chose about the woods. One day I strolled far; and there seemed to come to me a strange familiar feeling from the low level meadows, the lines of poplar trees, the fields of colza, and the grassy orchards which met my sight. Gazing awhile, and awhile drawing in that sweet scent of red rich earth, of cool fresh air, of the breath of lowing cattle, and of the hearts of unfolding spring-flowers, I knew it then. It was the country of the Silver Stag.

Beside me there was a low wall overtopped with prickly golden furze; beyond this stretched an orchard, its grass all unshaven and daisy filled, its old tree stems grey with the fairylike leafage of lichens.

I crossed the orchard, knowing it well; here often I had rolled the wind-fall apples to and fro in play, and here had I often seen the homestead doves sway drowsily in the moving boughs.

It was evening now; the shadows were growing long; it was all still; there was only the singing of the birds: for whoso amongst you believes that birds do not sing after the sunset-hour can surely have

walked but little in the fields and woods.

I passed on to the garden full of lilac and of chestnut bloom ; treading the ground reverently as the soil of a place that had given me shelter.

We are ever mindful of succour bestowed, of hospitality received ; where we have eaten bread there do we ever go with remembrance and thanksgiving ; we have not learned your art of oblivion, your science of neglect ; we cannot turn upon the hand that once tended us food ; we cannot make a mockery of the kindness that once befriended us ; we cannot emulate you there—we are but dogs.

Outside the porch, at a table of rough-hewn wood, under the old-remembered sign of the Silver Stag that swung above amidst the foliage, there sat a little group of student lads—lads with flushed happy faces and noisy ringing voices, who were breaking white wheaten rolls and jostling their glasses together.

They were served by a stout strong woman, with a scarlet kerchief bound about her black brows. Within the chambers there were noise, laughter, strange faces, the glimmer of candles, the sound of chinking glasses.

In the doorway there stood a burly and bearded

man, in a grey blouse, and with a pipe in his mouth. At his feet a yellow terrier was worrying, and worried by, an angry cat.

In the wide vine-hung casement of what had once been the painting-room of the Faustine, the lattices were pushed back, and there leaned a handsome dissolute girl with a velvet-tasselled cap on her head, and great ear-rings in her ears, and a square-cut scarlet bodice showing her bare chest. She was framed in the leaves and the coils of the vine; and was calling out, and laughing back, to the youths at the table in the garden.

At a glance I knew that there were no more present in this place the brave forbiddance of vice, the sweet clean ways of household service, the cheerful grace, the perfect purity, the honest kindness to man and beast, the order and the quietude that had reigned beneath this roof when Madelon and her mother had been sheltered by it.

As I gazed out from one of the leafy grassy ways that traversed the garden by so many paths, there came a youth who had been smoking in a little arbour formed by lilacs that arched above a rough-hewn bench. He was grave of face, and clad in velvet; I recognized him as an artist who had

used to frequent this place until in the year of the Faustine he had gone to Rome.

‘ You are landlord here—now ? ’ he asked.

The man kicked the cat off the terrier, and assented.

‘ Where is Madelon Bris ? ’

The man kicked the terrier in its turn off the threshold ere he answered :

‘ Madelon Bris ? She is in a religious order.’

‘ And the old mother ? ’

‘ Manon Bris ? She is dead.’

‘ It was on the death of the mother that Madelon became a nun ? ’

‘ Eh ? Yes : I think so. There was a day when Madelon went to Paris ; and was taken ill there ; and the old mother did not hear what had become of her for weeks, for months. People were kind, but old Manon fretted herself into her grave. When Madelon recovered of her fever and left the hospital, she found her mother dead. It was a shock, I suppose. Anyway—she took the vows. She is a Sister of Charity. Her hair was quite white when she came home ; she looked quite old ; I suppose it was the fever.

He paused, and blew a cloud of smoke, and

killed a night-moth fluttering near.

‘She is living still?’ the artist asked.

‘Ay—for what I know. When the cholera raged last year she worked very hard, I heard, and, they do say, saved many: as if by a saint’s miracle.’

‘She was a saint herself,’ the painter murmured. ‘Have you the living things she cared for?—the birds, the dog?’

‘The birds are here; at least the fowls are; all but the doves. I wrung their necks because they made such a noise. They were very good in a pastry.’

‘And the dog—Russ?’

The man blew smoke into the air with a sullen shame upon his bloated face.

‘He was here when I came. She was trying for leave for him to go to the convent. But he was always howling for her, and growling at us. So I got a fowling-piece, and shot him. He was very old, you know,—and savage. It was only safe to put him out of the way.’

The artist turned from the porch without a word, and went down the path, and out by the little gate: I stole away, sick at heart, back through the woods and the meadows.

From the broad, vine-hung chamber where the Faustine had glowed into life, the laugh of the wanton, where she leaned from the casement, rang out on the stillness of evening ; and the drunken, gay shouts of the students echoed over the leafy, silent, shadowy garden places, where, in his glad and gracious youth, the lips of Carlos had murmured of eternal love, and with the golden drowsy noons, and with the dewy summer nights, his dreams and hers had in belief beheld imperishable passion and immortal fame.

The other day I saw in your London a grand equipage sweep by me.

Within it, shrouded in ermine, was a woman whose broad, slumbering, brown eyes gazed with a hard, exultant scorn at the sun, as though to say, ' Shine you on any more victorious thing than I ? '

Beside her was a boy, with her look, though not with her beauty ; who, holding in his hand a jewelled whip with a long white lash, curled the lash round the naked shoulders of a little tattered child of his own years, and laughed as his carriage rolled on, and the street-waif's shrill moan struck the air.

His mother laughed also ; proud as the tigress when her whelp first tastes blood.

The boy was the heir to the Marquisate of Isla.

So great races decay, more foully than by poverty ; and when the Mob curses the Noble for some act of greed, of tyranny, or of vileness, ten to one that it curses its own kith and kin, which, by base stratagem or illicit love, has foisted the cur's heart into the lion's hide.

Truly is Avice Dare amidst those of whom the teacher of Galilee said, ' Verily they *have* their reward.'

Her young lord, dull, spiritless, cowed before her look as a slave before the scourge, drinks deep to find the death that his stubborn strength keeps at bay ; and meanwhile grants all she wills to one whom he has learned to fear with the keenest emotion of which his feeble nature is capable. She has incalculable wealth, immeasurable luxury, possessions at which even her avarice halts satisfied ; and all the power of a great race against her, cannot shake her or her son from their stronghold.

Society holds aloof from her indeed ; but with her riches she can summon crowds of courtiers, flatterers, and parasites. Moreover—she has become

devout ; has built a church, endowed a hospital, confessed a conversion. Cant, naked, is honoured throughout England. Cant, clothed in gold, is a King never in England resisted.

A bishop has not dined with her yet, but one will do doubtless ere long,—and then it will be possible enough that society will follow the apron, and consign to oblivion her antecedents.

From the hour that she sold me in the little street of the town in the Peak, she has been a woman with but one talent ; but that one talent is worth all the powers and graces of genius ; it is the talent to use the age in which she lives.

Genius is oftentimes but a poor fool, who, clinging to a thing that belongs to no age, Truth, does oftentimes live on a pittance and die in an hospital : but whosoever has the gift to measure aright their generation is invincible—living, they shall enjoy all the vices undetected ; and dead, on their tombstones they shall possess all the virtues.

It is thus well with her : meanwhile ;—

At the time when the warmth of the summer just touches on the ruddier, fresher weather of autumn, in the time when the flowers of summer are still blooming everywhere, but autumn is felt in the brimming

fulness of waters and the cool fragrance of winds, I found myself this year in my home-country of the Peak ; in the land where the altars of the Druid still stand on the moorland ; where the murex-stone of the Roman still lies on the hill-side ; where the pine and the fern fill the hollows and dells ; where the woods are ever damp with the dews of earthborn waters ; and where the old tongue of Shakespeare's England still is spoken in old-world houses and in brake-hidden huts.

Fate took me for a brief sojourn at a great mansion in that district ; and one day as I roamed amongst the lilac heather and the great plumed bracken, straying into a shady lonely dale, filled with stone-pines and fed by running brooks, with a shock of memory I felt that I was once more near my birthplace.

Once more I found my way through the old dim forest place, where the timid leverets fled at my coming, and the pretty stockdoves were dabbling their rosy feet in the freshets, and the water was bubbling, and dripping, and murmuring everywhere, under ground and above ground, and the great horned cattle were lying asleep hidden amongst the huge stems of the burr-

dock. It was all so still ; so quiet ; so strangely familiar ; the very kine, as they lifted their sleepy heads from amidst the broad green leaves, looked old remembered friends.

With little trouble I found my way—for dogs never forget—to the little cottage, standing all alone, clothed in its rose-thorn ; with the dusky woods shelving above it, and farther yet on high the slope of the wide moor flushed with the delicate crimsons and the deep lilacs of the heather that blent in that one soft melodious hue for which there is no name—a hue that glows in northern skies at sunset, as it glows on northern lands what time the heather blooms.

My heart was beating fast ; memories thronged on me ; old affection stirred : and yet—beyond all—there was a curious dull depression on me, a sense of irrevocable loss.

I felt that Ben was gone.

The sensitive nerves of our organizations feel the coming of woe as plants feel the coming of storms ; when your hound moans on the hill-side be sure that the dangers of the hills are near ; when your mastiff, howling, prays of you not to venture forth into the night, take warning that the snow will drive all

wanderers to their grave ; or that the swollen waters will sweep down the bridge and all who cross on it ; or that above the wold the thunder-clouds are gathering ; or that behind the hedge the ejected peasant hides with pike and musket ; or that in some shape or another Death will walk abroad that night.

In the early years of your world your race, dwelling in forests and on plains, alone with the earth and the sky, was swift to read portents and warnings ; and to this day the genius of the Savage, in the divination of signs and the smell of the tempest or of the foe afar off, ever laughs to shame and to scorn the baffled brain, and the muffled ear, and the purblind eye, of the civilized man. For, mustering in cities ; ceasing to watch the things of the earth and the air ; keen of pursuit for gold alone ; environed in a web of artificial needs ; burnishing the learning of the mind, but neglecting the instincts of the emotions ; you have lost this faculty of the prevision of woe, as you have lost the nomad's power to trace the step that has yet left no prints upon a sun-baked path, and to scent that the air is pregnant with the storm though the heavens smile with sunniest light. You have lost it, but we retain it—greatly to our hurt.

With sickness of heart I drew near the little cottage. The rose-thorn was all red and white with its summer interchange of rosy berries and white star-shaped blossoms. The brown brook ran underneath the grasses, glimmering golden in the sun. The old grey lichen, and the green wet mosses, clothed the stone wall on whose topmost coping grew tufts of harebells glistening with dew.

The wide door stood open to the light, and amongst the great yew boughs above the roof the little birds were moving, and were murmuring, with tireless wing and ceaseless song.

Nothing was changed, and yet—I knew that one change was there.

On the threshold stood three figures : two were girls ruddy, well-shapen, poorly clad, with sunburnt arm, and with bare feet. The third was the old, grey, bent, tough figure of the pedlar Dick o' tha Wynnats ; before him, on the stone sill of the door, was his pack thrown open ; and once more I heard his thin cracked wicked voice that was persuasive in the ears of maidens and of women as the subtlest and sweetest music, because it ever brought flattery to their vanities and temptation to their senses.

‘Now, my dearies,’ he was crying to them in his wheedling, coaxing tones, spreading out before their round wondering eyes his ribbons, and his laces, and his jewellery of brass. ‘Look’ee here ! These arena goods to threap.* Ye’ll busk ye’sells rarely wi’ em, my wenchies. And wi’ Wake time sae close tew’ee, ye mun want a new bit of finery to dight ye up a bit. Eh ! yer daddie’ll niver say nought ; for sure ye’re kaded † as niver lasses was. Dew iver he gar ‡ ye dew whatna ye dinna like ? I wouldna fang a farthin’ o’ yew gif I werena weel sure as yer old feyther be allus sae glad to pleasure ye. Ye’re pratty as pratty can be—leastways when ye’re pranked up wi’ a bit o’ dress ; a’ yew wimmin want dress ; a’out it ye’re ony like poor speckit hens that hanna a top-knot, an’ are ony good for nestin’ and broodin’ out o’ sight. Look’ee, my dearies, I hae hitten on tha very things ta grace ye ; jist these ribbons for yer bonny black hair ; and this length o’ lace for yer bonny white brists, an’ these sparklin’ stones to glower i’ yer ears—’

But I turned away, sick at heart, and sure that

* To argue about.

† Caressed, spoiled : a pet-lamb in the Peak is called a ‘kade.’

‡ Compel.

my old lost master no more was there ; and the rest of the pedlar's speech died away out of my hearing as I slunk back to return through the wood.

I left him there, in the sun on the threshold, holding up his glittering trash before the sight of the two country wenches ; and coaxing them to buy and to wear, with all the old wheedling wicked wiles wherewith he had beguiled Avice Dare.

Of a surety the world that stretched outside the woods and the hills of the Peak had no better caterer for the food of its sins than wily Dick o' tha Wynnats, who bought the frail female souls with a glass bead and a penny ribbon that he might sell them again for his own profit of a silver piece and a quart of ale !

O Love ! what offence hast thou done to mankind, that on thy mighty name should be charged the guilt and the vice that are daughters of Avarice, of Ignorance, and of Vanity ?

I left them, not bearing well to see that once beloved little lowly home in the occupance of strangers, and found my road through the breadth of the pine wood to that farther verge of it where the forge of Ambrose the blacksmith had stood.

On my way I passed the limestone quarry where

Ben had been wont to labour, and where I had spent so many a summer-day.

I suppose they had ceased to work it ; for already down its white jagged sides the grass and the bluebells were growing ; already in its crevices the ferns were waving, and in its dells the sheep were grazing ; the joyous deep-toned voice of Trust no more rang from hill to hill and called the straying lambs to fold ; and where the blows of the pickaxe, and the laughter of the men, and the roll of the heavy waggon-wheels, once had roused the echoes of the woods and rocks, all now was silent.

I left it, quiet there, with only now and then the low pathetic bleating of a mother-sheep waking the stillness all about ; and wandered on through the maze of the pine stems, and over the soft carpet of the mosses and mountain-grasses sown with shining millions of fir-needles, and growing ruddy now and then with the tiny fruit of the wild strawberry.

It was a long way, but I found it. The forge was standing there, with the red light of its fire blinking through its square ivy-hung window ; and over its half-door the smith Ambrose was leaning. It was high noon, and he was at rest awhile. The little garden before his house was very trim and

green with its high walls of box, and its thickets of white and red currant, and its one great walnut tree that rose in a stately pyramid of leaf.

On the wooden bench under that tree, on which the men about were wont to rest whilst he within shod their horses, there was a tattered dark-eyed gypsey sitting now. I knew him again; they had used to call him ‘Daffe o’ Sough Tor,’* and he had been a favourite with Ben, as with the other people of the moorside, for his docility, his vivacity, and his droll waggish ways. He was accustomed to wander over the whole north country far and wide; but the place where he loved best to dwell was in a wattle hut made in a cavernous clift of the Sough Tor, a large mass of rock overhanging a deep small sheet of shadowy reedy water in this wood.

Ambrose had just supplied him with a draught of milk, and a half loaf of rye bread, and was leaning over the doorway in converse with him. I had no dread of poor Daffe, for he was, unlike most of his kind, very honest, and given to harming no living thing; and I went near, and hid myself under a burrdock leaf, and hearkened to their speech.

* The fool of the cliff by the pond.

For awhile it brought me no knowledge : it was speech of oxen and of horses, of harvest and of fruit, of folk-lore and of the northward wanderings of Daffe in the past year : but I listened on—seeking news of him, feeling the sure presage that there would be but one kind of tidings that ever would reach me of my best beloved and earliest friend.

And it came at last,—the story which all things had seemed to tell me, from the soundless wood, and the grass-grown quarry, and the threshold on which the strangers stood.

‘Ye hae niver took na wife, Ambrose?’ said the wanderer Daffe.

‘Na, na,’ answered Ambrose simply.

‘Sure one ’ud ony frush ye,’ asserted Daffe, thoughtfully. ‘Ye ha gotten a so tidy an weel redd-up; an’ gif she were a slattern,—most o’ ’em mawthers is.’

‘Theer be tidy wenches for as wants ’em,’ said the smith; ‘but for mysell—sister Ruth, as wed wi’ Isaac Cliffe o’ Friggat Mill, and her wee ’uns, be fam’ly enow for me.’

‘Theer wur time as ’e thoct otherwise?’

‘Theer be times as all o’ us dew—e’en ’yerself, Daffe, tho’ ye’re so gi’en ta rovin’ an reivin’—’

‘Ay,’ assented Daffe, and he was silent a moment, when he sat under the walnut tree, with a grave dreamy light in his wandering eyes.

‘Ben Dare, he be dead?’ he asked, suddenly.
‘They telled me so by Darron’s side.’*

Ambrose bent his head, silently.

‘When wur’t?’

‘Last simmer-time, i’th’ aftermath.’

‘It were a ston’ as killed him?’

‘Ay,’ said Ambrose, softly shading his eyes with his hand from the sun that streamed through the aisles of pine.

‘How wur’t?’

‘They was a blastin’. He’d allus thoct as he’d dee that way, ye know. They pit mair pooder i’ quarry than common; and the ston’ it split, and roared, and crackit, wi’ a noise like tha crack o’ doom. And one bit on ’t, big as ox, were shot i’ th’ air, an fell, unlookit for like, and dang him tew the groun’, and crushit him,—a’lyin’ richt athwart his brist.’

‘An’ they couldna stir it?’

‘They couldna. I heerd tha’ other min screech richt tew here, an’ I knew what it wur, tha shrill

* The river Derwent.

screech comin' jist i' top o' tha blastin' roar; an' I ran, an' ran—na gaze-hound fleeter. An' we couldna raise it—me an' Tam, an' Job, an' Gideon o' the Mere, an' Moses Legh o' Wissin Edge, a' strong min and i' our prime. We couldna stir it, till Moses o' Wissen Edge he thoct o' pittin' fir-poles underneath—poles as was sharp an' slim i' thur ends, an' stout an' hard further down. Whin tha poles was weel thrust under we heaved, an' heaved, an' heaved, and got it slanted o' one side, and drawed him out; an' thin it were too late, too late! A' tha brist was crushit in—frushed flesh and bone together. He jist muttered i' his throat, "Tha little lass, tha little lass!" and then he turned him on his side, and hid his face upo' the sod. When we raised him he wur dead.'

The voice of Ambrose sank very low; and where he leaned over his smithy door the tears fell slowly down his sun-bronzed cheeks.

'Alack a day!' sighed Daffe softly. 'Sure a better 'un niver drew breath i' the varsal world!'

'An' that's trew,' Ambrose made answer, his voice hushed and very tender.

'He was varra changed-like,' murmured Daffe, his hand wandering amongst the golden blossoms

of the stone crop. 'He niver were the same crittur arter the lass went awa'. He niver were the same—niver. Ta seemed tew mak an auld man o' him a' at once.'

'It did,' said Ambrose brokenly. 'He couldna bear tew look na tew spik to nane o' us. He were bent i' body, an' grey o' head, that awfu' night when he kem back fra' the waking. It were fearfu' tew see; an' we couldna dew nought. Th' ony thing as he'd take tew were Trust.'

'Be dog alive?'

'Na. Trust he'd never quit o' Ben's grave. He wouldna take bit na drop. He wouldna be touchit; not whin he was clem would he be tempted awa. And he died—jist tha fifth day arter his master.'

'An' the wench? Hev' ee e'er heerd on her?'

'Niver—niver. Mappen she's dead and gone tew. She broke Ben's heart for sure; long ere tha ston' crushit life out o't.'

'And wheer may he lie?'

Ambrose clenched his brawny hand, his eyes darkened, his swarthy face flushed duskily.

'Wheer? What think 'ee, Daffe? When we took o' him up for the burial, ta tha church ower theer beyant tha wood, the passon he stoppit us, a'

tha gate of tha buryin' field. The passon he med long words, and sed as how a unb'liever sud niver rest i' blessed groun', sin he willna iver enter into the sight o' tha Lord. He sed as how Ben were black o' heart and wicked o' mind, an' niver set fute i' church-door, and niver ate o' tha sacrament bread, and niver not thocht o' God nor o' Devil; an' he wouldna say tha rites o'er him an' 'twere iver so, an' he wouldna let him lie i' tha holy earth, nor i' tha pale o' tha graveyard. Well, we could na gae agin him—we poor min, an he a squire and passon tew. Sae we took him back, five weary mile; and we brocht him here, and we dug his grave under them pines, and we pit a cross o' tha bark to mark the place, and we laid old Trust, when he died, by his side. I were mad with grief like, thin; it were awfu' ta ha him forbad Christian burial.'

'Dew it matter?' asked the gentle Daffe wistfully. He had never been within church-doors himself.

Ambrose gave a long troubled sigh.

'Aweel! at first it seemed awfu'—awfu'! And to think as Ben 'ud niver see the face o' his God was mair fearfu' still. But as time gees on and on—I can see his grave fra' here, tha' cross we cut is tha

glimmer o' white on that stem a'yont,—it dew seem as 'tis fitter like fer him to lie i' tha fresh free woods, wi' tha birds a' chirmin abuve him, an' a' tha forest things as he minded a flyin', an' nestin', an' runnin', an' rejoicin' around him. 'Tis allus so still there, an' peacefu'. 'Tis blue and blue now, wi' tha hy'cinths; and there's one bonnie mavis as dew make her home wi' each spring abuve the grave-stone. 'Bout not meetin' his God, I dunno—I darena say nowt anent it—but, for sure, it dew seem to me that we canna meet Him no better, nor fairer, than wi' lips that ha ne'er lied to man nor to woman, and wi' hands as niver hae harmed the poor dumb beasts nor the prattlin' birds. It dew seem so. I canna tell.'

As the words died off his lips the sun fell yet more brightly through the avenues of the straight, dark, odorous pines; sweet silent winds swept up the dewy scents of mosses, and of leaves, and of wild hyacinths; and on the stillness of that lonely place there came one tremulous, tender sound. It was the sound of the mavis singing.

'I canna tell; but for sure it is well with him?' said Ambrose; and he bared his head, and bowed it humbly, as though in the voice of the

mavis he heard the answer of God :

‘ It is well.’

Ah ! I trust that it may be so for you ; that the sweetness of your arrogant dreams of an unshared eternity be not wholly a delusion ; that for you—although to us you do deny it—there may be found pity, atonement, compensation, in some great Hereafter.



L'ENVOI.

‘My dear,’ says Fanfreluche with supreme scorn, and her nose in the air over the last of my proof sheets, ‘I don’t think much of your Memoirs; and I can’t say that there is any moral to be deduced from them, except one’—

‘And that is?’ I ask anxiously.

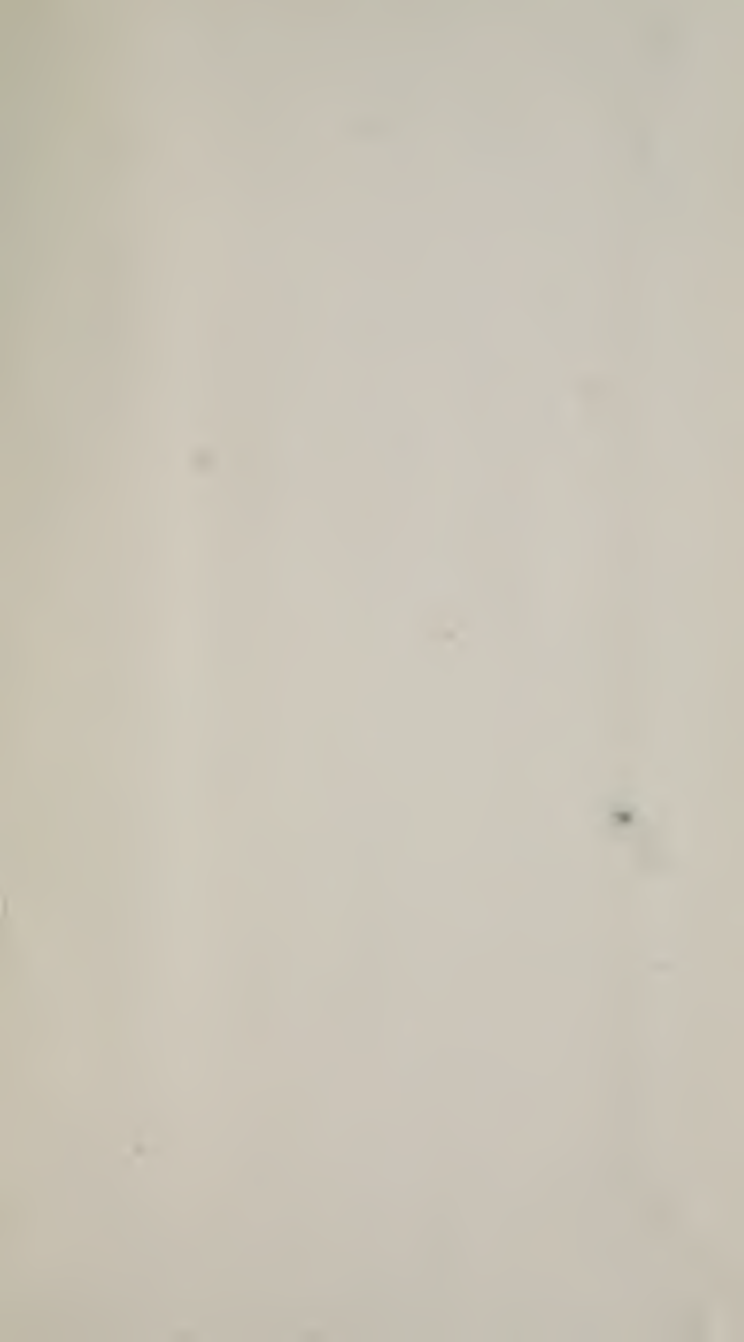
‘That there is nothing on earth satisfactory except—A GOOD DINNER.’

I think she is right; and my consciousness that in an earlier chapter I did my best humbly to add my small quota to that study of human happiness which lies in the great Art of Dining, alone sustains me under the rashness and the vanity which have led me to offer to the world of letters, the adventures and the philosophies of your very obedient servant

P A C K .

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